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Rehabilitating the Witch: The Literary Representation of the Witch from the *Malleus Maleficarum* to *Les Enfants du sabbat*

by

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ABSTRACT

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The representation of the witch in French literature has evolved considerably over the centuries. While originally portrayed as a benevolent and caring healer in works by Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes, and the anonymous author of *Amadas et Ydoine*, the witch eventually underwent a dramatic and unfortunate transformation. By the fifteenth century, authors began to portray her as a malevolent and dangerous agent of the Christian Devil. Martin Le Franc, Pierre de Ronsard, Joachim du Bellay, François Rabelais, and Pierre Corneille all created evil witch figures that corresponded with this new definition. It was not until the eighteenth century, through the works of Voltaire and the Encyclopédistes, that the rehabilitation of the witch began.

By the twentieth century, Anne Hébert, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maryse Condé, and Sebastiano Vassalli began to rewrite the witch character by

engaging in a process of demystification and by demonstrating that the "witch" was really just a victim of the society in which she lived. These authors humanized their witch figures by concentrating on the victimization of their witch protagonists and by exposing the ways in which their fictional societies unjustly created identities for their witch protagonists that were based on false judgments and rumors. Hébert attacks Sigmund Freud's association of the witch and the hysteric, Sartre utilizes his witches to expose many of his existential ideals, Condé highlights the role that racism played in witchcraft, and Vassalli strives to rewrite history by telling the story from the point of view of his witch character.

Each twentieth-century author provides a story that deconstructs the very nature of the witch as this had been constructed over time, and shows how witches expose the problems associated with understanding one's place in the world in both their individual and their social dimensions. The witch, for these authors, challenges dominant norms and reveals how much our identities are influenced by our interactions with other individuals. And, because the witches in each text are marginal beings, they expose the repressiveness of their particular environments and the idiosyncrasies of their cultures. In all these ways, or so these 20th-century authors contend, we as modern readers, can relate to their situations and learn from their stories.

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Introduction
Who is the Witch?

The word "witch" immediately conjures chimerical mental images still reinforced in twentieth-century popular culture and literary representations – images associated almost entirely with women.[1] For most of us today, the witch is an evil woman who dresses in black, has a pointed hat, and rides on a broomstick, thereby defying the laws of physics as she soars above the heads of her unsuspecting victims. Behind her black cat and giant cauldron, of course – behind her point shoes, the wart on her nose, and the green tint to her skin – she has also been imagined and punished over time as a figure of a certain charm, both fascinating and seductive. She is frightening but also alluring. Her paranormal powers elicit both fear and envy. Clearly, as she has been invented in the gaze of others over the course of time, she is a figure of some complication. Her outlines are a product of both very "real" superstitious thought and of the literary, historical, and popular images that have traced her path over the centuries.

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[1] In her critical review article, *The Witch 'She'/ The Historian 'He':Gender and the Historiography of the European Witch-Hunts*, Elspeth Whitney examines gender from a feminist perspective and notes that "Whatever the profiles of actual accused and convicted witches, both the popular and elite mental image of the witch was invariably first that of a woman." [Elspeth Whitney, "The Witch 'She'/The Historian 'He': Gender and the Historiography of the European Witch-Hunts," *Journal of Women's History* 7.3 (1995) 88.]

It is easy to forget, of course, that the popular images we find so thrilling were not "images" at all for past societies, but the real thing: witches were dangerous, even damnable, women of evil character. The fear of them was so great, indeed, that during some periods they were massacred at an alarming rate. The "witch craze," the term coined by historians to describe the most deadly period in witch history, reached its peak in Western Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and by the end of the seventeenth century, untold thousands of women had met their deaths upon conviction of this horrible crime. Exact figures are difficult to come by, but the best estimates set the number of the dead near sixty thousand, and this is just for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[2]

While occasional men were accused and convicted of witchcraft during this fatal craze, the witch was envisioned primarily as a female, with men implicated most often for merely being related by birth or marriage to women who had themselves been found accused of witchcraft. According to some reports, women made up eighty to eighty-five percent of those executed for witchcraft,[3] and were accused, convicted, and executed, in

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[2] Brian Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 1995) 21.

[3] See Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (Brooklyn: The Faculty Press, 1973) 8. See Brian Levack, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1999) 124. See Sigrid Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern*

comparison to men, at a ratio of about four to one.[4] It is no wonder that many feminist scholars have referred to witchcraft persecutions as "holocausts of women" and as "women hunting." And it is no wonder that the modern image of the witch remains almost always female.[5]

Those who believed in witches maintained that the "witch" was a real and dangerous individual who engaged in countless horrific actions because she was motivated by hatred, malice, or the pure enjoyment that came with causing mischief. As I will demonstrate in my first chapter, Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer's witchcraft treatise, *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1487), helped to cement a precise definition for the witch. For these two writers, she was a person who performed harmful magic, made a pact with the Devil, and paid homage to him by engaging in sexual relations with him. Their "witch" was a blend of both superstition and religion. The two Dominicans believed that witches were the worldly link that connected the Christian Devil to men, suggested that the Devil could not operate without "the

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Germany (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995) 5. See Robert Muchembled, *La Sorcière au village* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991) 13.

[4] Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe 400-700: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2001) 17.

[5] Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987) 274. Diane Purkiss. *The Witch Hunt in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 8. *The Burning Times: Women and Spirituality Series*, dir. M. Armstrong, M. Pettigrew, S. Trow, National Film Board of Canada, 1990. Christina Larner, "Was Witch-Hunting Woman-Hunting?" *The Witchcraft Reader,* ed. Darren Oldridge (New York: Routledge,1966) 273.

assistance of some agent,"[6] and claimed that the Devil needed witches to fulfill his evil tasks.[7] They argued that witches possessed malicious powers, using these to cause disease and plague, raise storms, impede fertility, harm small children, and kill cattle and crops, among other things.

Perhaps the most frightening and alluring part of the witch for those who believed in her were the strange ways in which she could use her body as she worked to accomplish her evil deeds. She could allegedly transform herself (or her victim) into countless forms and could also take to the air on a broomstick, on a chair, on animals, or without any instrument at all.[8] For those who believed that witches could really accomplish such feats, she seemed both human and superhuman: her body grounded her in the rational world but her supernatural powers pushed her into the paranormal. She was also linked, however, to the everyday and mundane, something that epitomized in her preferred use of the broomstick when flying. The broomstick symbolized a real existence, but one where the very emblem of

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[6] Sprenger and Kramer 11.

[7] They claim "the Catholic truth is this...to bring about evils...witches and the devil always work together...one can do nothing without the aid and assistance of the other." [Spernger and Kramer 18.]

[8] In the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the most influential witchcraft treatiste, Sprenger and Kramer write that "They take the unguent...and anoint with it a chair or a broomstick; whereupon they are immediately carried up into the air...at times [the devil] transports the witches on animals, which are not true animals but devils in that form; and sometimes even without any exterior help they are visibly carried solely by the operation of the devil's power." [Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers (London: The Folio Society, 1968) 107.]

female domesticity had been perverted into an instrument for accomplishing evil, supernatural tasks. On her broomstick, she was imagined to hover in between the mundane and the extraordinary, challenging traditional relations between body and identity as she defied the laws of science.

Societies that believed in witches contended that there were two different types of reality. On the one hand, they believed there was a normal, everyday human reality and on the other hand that there was a demonic anti-reality inhabited by demons and the Christian Devil. Under normal circumstances, they believed that the two realms of reality remained separate. But they contended that the demons that inhabited the world of the anti-reality were bent on gaining access to normal human reality and causing havoc in it. They believed, like Sprenger and Kramer, that witches were a medium through which the Devil could work his evil. With the aid of witches, they claimed that the Devil could cross from demonic anti-reality into human reality. Witches, as they defined them, were thus both separated from human society and crucially intertwined with it.

During the height of this "holocaust of women" in Europe, almost anything strange and fearful was attributed to witchcraft. Today most scholars agree that the idea of the witch was fabricated and that witch hunts were the result of panic, hysteria, a need for someone to blame for the ills of

daily life, and general anxiety. Scholars like Jules Michelet, Andrew Sanders, Robert Muchembled, and Alan Macfarlane contend that witches were scapegoats who were the victims of general fears about things they did not cause. Michelet claims that witches were "l'universel martyr" of the Middle Ages and believes that witchcraft existed in societies characterized by extreme poverty and a serious lack of contentment.[9] He writes that "le désespoir...amène l'état de la sorcière. ..."[10] Muchembled argues that the "witch" was a simple "bouc émissaire" who suffered when peasants sought to blame someone for their own bad luck. He suggests that the "witch" was the reflection of the superstitious belief system of the sixteenth - and seventeenth - century French peasants and points out that the cultural elite began a campaign focused against the peasants' "conception magique et animiste de l'existence."[11] Sanders concentrates on the links between witch beliefs and social structures,[12] agreeing with Alan Macfarlane that individuals used accusations of witchcraft to transfer guilt, and positing that

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[9] Jules Michelet, *La Sorcière* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1966) 284.

[10] Michelet 78.

[11] Muchembled writes that "les élites culturelles et sociales avaient décidé l'éradication de toutes les superstitions paysannes, appelant désormais démoniaque ce qui relevait pour les villageois d'une conception magique et animiste de l'existence, désignant un bouc émissaire : la sorcière, servante du diable." [Muchembled 104.] I provide a more thorough analysis of Michelet in chapter two and Muchembled in chapter three.

[12] Andrew Sanders, *A Deed Without a Name: The Witch in Society and History* (Oxford: Berg, 1995).

the phenomenon was directly linked to the transition of a communitarian society to an individualistic one.[13] Some scholars concentrate on the link between witchcraft and the Catholic Church. Stuart Clark, for example, argues that witchcraft was an "intellectual resource" used by the learned elite and contends that ministers taught that *maleficia* were providential afflictions sent to provoke repentance. Like Michelet, Sanders, and Muchembled, Clark links witchraft with scapegoating, showing how those who believed in witchcraft used it as a tool to persuade others of the wrongdoings of accused witches, suppressing in this way any seeds of doubt.[14] Other scholars, like Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, point out the association between witches and medicine. They explain that men established the medical field as a male domain and argue that university-trained physicians claimed control over women's bodies and destroyed the power of wise women who offered medical aid by declaring them witches. Still other scholars concentrate on the association between witchcraft and psychiatry and suggest that witches were women who were mentally ill. They contend that rudimentary medicine made it difficult to interpret bizarre

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[13] Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1978) 197.

[14] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 396.

behavior as anything other than supernatural.[15] Certain feminist scholars have focused on the witch as an example of the persecution of women and of their perceived inferior status. As the witchcraft historian Carol Karlsen puts it, "the story of witchcraft was primarily the story of women," a story that showcased male fears about women and their proper place in society and demonstrated the extent to which systematic violence could be practiced against the female sex.[16] Other feminist scholars, finally, argue that the witch plays a more complex role in feminist texts. Justyna Sempruch suggests in her recent study that the evolution of the "witch" follows the same trajectory as that of modern feminism. The witch evolved, Sempruch argues, from that (radically feminist) woman who is culturally subjugated and victimized to a superwoman of sovereign and mythical power. For her, the witch was a dialogical figure associated with both the presymbolic mother and the phallic monstrous feminine but then broke free from all bonds of clear definition to inhabit the "heterogenous spaces that exist beyond the accumulation of stigmas."[17]

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[15] See Robert D. Anderson, "The History of Witchcraft: A Review with Some Psychiatry Comments," American Journal of Psychiatry 126 (1970): 1727-35. See Judith S. Neaman, *Suggestion of the Devil: The Origin of Madness* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1975).

[16] Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York: WW Norton, 1987) xii.

[17] Justyna Sempruch, *Fantasies of Gender and the Witch in Feminist Theory and Literature* (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2008).

These examples reflect the extraordinary flexibility of the term "witch." Constantly cast and recast, this female figure has undergone transformations as dramatic as those in any pantomime. The "witch" has been the subject of numerous debates and has attracted the attention of many scholars who have attempted to analyze her phenomenon from the perspectives of a whole spectrum of backgrounds. These scholars agree that the "witch" was an imaginative creation – that those who believed in witchcraft created her from their own imagined fear and fancy. Witches were not real. They were figments of an overactive imagination.

I myself became interested in witches after reading Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière noire de Salem* (1986) and Anne Hébert's *Les Enfants du sabbat* (1975) in an independent study seminar. I began with simple questions. Why were women more likely to be associated with and convicted of this crime? Were there female character traits that made women easier to associate with witchcraft? Who defined witches and decided that women were witches? Then I started to think about witches using modern gender theory and realized that because individuals who charged women with the crime of witchcraft defined a new identity for the woman accused, the witch figure allows us to examine notions of gender and sexuality in a way that few other figures provide. If we assume, with

today's scholars, that the witch was a social and cultural construction, we realize that she had both physical corporeality and a social and cultural identity added to this by society. Her female existence (sex) thus preceded her witch status (gender): only when an accuser defined her a supernatural being was she forced to assume a new identity/essence. She became a witch. The belief in the existence of the witch thus created the essence of the witch, and the witch's essence, like all social and cultural constructions of gender, was both created for her and forced upon her.

The witch is a unique figure, however, because once she is defined in this way, her new identity suddenly precedes (and eclipses) her corporeal existence. The new witch identity becomes her sole identity. One could say that the moment she is accused of witchcraft, her new witch status forces the redefinition of her female bodily existence: her "witch gender" redefines her human sexuality. Her female body (sex) is now considered superhuman and becomes extraordinary while her new identity shifts radically and harshly away from any originating link with the female.

Those who accused women of witchcraft labeled and defined the witch, made her into an object, created a new essence for her, and finally labored to convince others of her evil powers. But believing in the witch required the acceptance of the supernatural. In order for the witch hunter to

convince others that they must murder these women, he had to convince them that she was a real danger. He had to challenge their world views and to sell the idea of a mysterious and transcendent being. He had to argue that while the witch lived in the "real" world and appeared to have a female body, she was also superhuman, and the master of powers beyond explanation.

Certainly the violence against women whom many felt were witches reached horrific levels. Adding to this violence was the confusion that witch accusers and those who believed in witches may have felt. They felt that they couldn't identify easily "the witch" from the "non-witch," and this increased both their fear and their vitriol. If this allegedly supernatural figure had had angel or fairy wings to help her to fly, a pointed hat and shoes, or green skin like in popular representations, this would have made her easier to identify. Instead, the witch hunter and all those who believed in witches labeled certain women as "witches" and assumed that they were anthropomorphic figures who possessed materialities that masked their malevolent natures. Their "witch" was not a marvelous unicorn, ogre, or fairy. The accuser and all those who believed were pushed to their limits; in order to believe in the witch, they had to suspend rational thought. The

image of the witch that they created transcended all human concepts, considerations, and expectations.

We know today that the "witch" was simply a woman - that she had real and tangible corporeal existence - and that the witch hunter created a horrific fantasy that caused the death of many innocent women. But it is perhaps this complicated and convoluted link between the witch figure's body and her existence that makes her so interesting to us today. As I continued researching witchcraft, I realized that while the European witch hunts have attracted the attention of scholars from various fields, no one has been able to fully understand or explain the creation of this phenomenal creature in the first place. Perhaps this is what fostered my own intellectual curiosity. While I realized that I probably would not be able to fully explain why the witch existed or why this figure continues to fascinate us today, I was interested in examining how the "witch" has evolved in literature. Who, I wondered, is the twentieth-century witch?

During the witch craze, the word "witch" was a term of opprobrium reserved for the most contemptible and feared of the human race. But is this the image we still hold today? Who is the twentieth-century witch and how do today's authors utilize this supernatural female character? What is the point of the figure's rebirth in the twentieth century and what does the figure

symbolize and evoke? Why turn to a figure from the past and how relevant is she for our understanding of the present? How did we create the modern image of the witch and what do we really mean today when we use the term?

Deep down, I also wondered why the witch figure is still so mesmerizing a character. I turned my focus to the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) to see if he believed that the idea of the witch is an archetype that haunts the deepest parts of our psyches and fascinates our minds. Colloquially the word archetype refers to something that serves as a model or pattern. For Jung, however, archetypes are reflections of impersonal and objective elements in the psyche. They are inherited memories in the mind or "patterns of instinctual behavior" that are represented by universal symbols.[18] They are "forms without content" that remain unconscious and only become conscious when they are colored by personal experience.[19] The Jungian scholar Sherry Salman defines archetypes as "biologically based patterns of behavior, symbolic images of these patterns, transpersonal structures, transcendental essences, and quintessential distillates" of imagination and meaning.[20] And Paule Lebrun

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[18] C.G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung: The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, ed. William McGuire, vol. 9i (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 44.

[19] Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 48.

[20] Sherry Salman, "The Creative Psyche: Jung's Major Contributions," The Cambridge Companion to Jung, ed. Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) 63.

writes that they are "...des espèces de modèles primitifs idéaux qui influence en profondeur nos comportements. Images profondes engendrées par la civilisation et partagées de façon semi-conscient par l'ensemble des gens."[21]

Jung believed that we encounter archetypes in myths, fairy tales, dreams, and visions and contended that the universality of the archetypes in these mediums proves that they are not personal acquisitions. They are, according to Jung, inborn characteristics of eternal human nature that have "existed since the remotest times."[22] Archetypes are also the building blocks of what Jung referred to as the "collective unconscious," an unconscious that contrasts with Sigmund Freud's "unconscious" – the personal and subjective memories, feelings, and ideas that were once conscious but have been repressed.[23] Jung's collective unconscious, unlike Freud's, is universal, impersonal, and identical in all individuals.

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[21] Paule Lebrun, "Les Sorcières," *Châtelaine* Nov. 1976: 39.

[22] Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 5.

[23] Jung clarifies the differences between the collective unconscious and Freud's notion of personal unconscious when he writes that there is "...a more or less superficial layer of the unconscious [that] is undoubtedly personal. I call it the *personal unconscious*. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the collective unconscious. ... It is identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us" (3-4). Jung also provides a good definition and explanation of the differences between the two when he writes "While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but own their existence exclusively to heredity. Whereas the personal unconscious consists for the most part of *complexes*, the content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of *archetypes*." [Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 42.]

Reading Jung, I realized that perhaps my fascination with witches was the result of a collective unconscious we all share, one in which she is a primitive archetype. Perhaps we were all at the mercy of a collective unconscious that helps to structure the way in which we perceive the witch. In *Mind and Earth* (1927), Jung suggests that the witch archetype appears in fairy tales that he claims are infantile forms of legends and myths.[24] In *Symbols of Transformation* (1952) he includes the witch among his list of common archetypes along with the anima, animus, wise old man, shadow, and earth mother.[25] And in *Symbols and the Interpretation of Dreams* (1961) he points out that while we no longer believe in witches and other "superstitious numina," these archetypes still exist in our collective unconscious.[26] He suggests that witch hunts are proof of the existence of the witch archetype,[27] notes that there is a "thin wall" that separates us from the last witch hunt,[28] and argues that instead of driving away the demons and witches of past centuries, we have "overlooked the fact that they were, at

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[24] C. G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung: Civilization in Transition*, ed. William McGuire, vol. 10 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1964) 33.

[25] C. G. Jung, *Collected Works of C. G. Jung: Symbols of Transformation*, ed. William McGuire, vol. 5 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1956) 350.

[26] C. G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung: The Symbolic Life*, ed. William McGuire, vol. 18 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976) 256.

[27] Jung, *The Symbolic Life* 485.

[28] C. G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung: Aion*, ed. William McGuire, vol. 9ii (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1951) 44.

bottom, the products of certain factors of the human psyche."[29] According to Jung, my fascination (and yours) with these imaginary figures might not be an accident.

As I continued to read Jung, however, I made an important discovery: even though the witch figure may be a product of our own psyches, we are not simply preprogrammed to create a horrific witch figure or even to recreate the popular image of the witch that we associate with Halloween. Jung makes it clear in *Symbols and the Interpretation of Dreams* (1961) that images formed from archetypes are "...not limitlessly exchangeable but always belong to the economy of a living individual, from which [they] cannot be detached and used arbitrarily."[30] As Salman explains, the "...archetype proper is a skeleton which requires personal experience to flesh it out."[31] In other words, Jung argues that archetypes only represent abstract themes. The idea of the witch is thus incomplete, unstable, and open-ended. My vision of the witch does not have to be the same as yours. If you create a concrete image to accompany the theme, it is a personal variation influenced by your own experiences.

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[29] Jung, *The Symbolic Life* 594.

[30] Jung, *The Symbolic Life* 257.

[31] Salman 64.

My research on Jung left me with many questions. I learned that we have the power to mold and create the witch so that she fits our own fantasies: that she is an imaginative figure who is personal, timeless, and evolving, occupying, as she does, our minds haunting our deepest dreams. But I also knew that she was a historical creation, and I wanted to know how she had been viewed and defined from that perspective. What did people really mean by the term "witch" when they massacred with such impunity so many innocent women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? I asked myself, "What is the witch?"

In chapter one, I attempt to answer my own question through an analysis of the major points of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487). Using the arguments of Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer in this influential witchcraft treatise, I suggest that the two Dominicans delineate a modern definition for the witch that continues to influence today's literary representations. I argue that Anne Hébert's *Les Enfants du sabbat* (1975), Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Sorcières de Salem* (1957), Sebastiano Vassalli's *La Chimera* (1990), and Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière noire de Salem* (1986) all show the influence of the *Malleus*. But, as I demonstrate, the twentieth-century authors also examine the idiosyncrasies of the *Malleus*

from a modern perspective that allows them to critique Sprenger and Kramer's claims.

In chapter two, I continue to analyze the importance of the *Malleus* and show how, prior to the publication and dissemination of this seminal witchcraft treatise, the witch was often portrayed as a benevolent, compassionate, and benign figure. In Marie de France's *Lais* (12th century), *Amadas et Ydoine* (1190-1220), and Chrétien de Troyes *Cligès* (1176) the witch characters are generous and kind women who try to lend assistance to those in need. I suggest that Martin Le Franc's *Le Champion des dames* (1400-42), written just prior to the *Malleus*, represents a turning point in the witch's literary representation. I argue that Le Franc's text presents both sides of the witchcraft debate and demonstrates the emergence of a new definition of the witch. I suggest that after the publication of the *Malleus*, literary texts depict witches as evil women who live to promote harm. I trace the witch's representation in Pierre de Ronsard's *Les Odes* (1550), François Rabelais's *Le Tiers Livre* (1546), and Corneille's *Médée* (1635) and contend that the witch only begins to regain a positive image at the end of the seventeenth century. I show how the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century begin to doubt the existence of the witch and demonstrate how Voltaire and the *Encyclopédistes* engage in a project that aims to debunk all

superstitious beliefs. I argue that historical scholars like Jules Michelet begin a rehabilitation of the witch in the nineteenth century, suggest that witches disappear from literary texts in this period, and argue that the witch, like the fantastic genre, forces us to hesitate between two alternate and distinct realities.

My third chapter focuses on twentieth-century "witches" and shows how authors as diverse as the Québécois author and poet Anne Hébert (1916-2000), the famous French existentialist philosopher and author Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), the Guadeloupian French language author Maryse Condé (1930-), and the Italian historical novelist Sebastiano Vassalli (1941-) have all engaged in a process of demystification of the witch character by demonstrating that the "witch" was really just a victim of the society in which she lived. I suggest that the twentieth-century authors humanize their witch figures by concentrating on the victimization of the witch protagonists and that they expose the ways in which their societies unjustly created identities for the protagonists that are based on false judgments and rumors. Using the arguments of historical scholars such as Robert Muchembled and Andrew Sanders, I demonstrate how the twentieth-century witch character is both a scapegoat of her society and a victim of its intense interdependent relationships. I suggest that the authors point out the

victimization of the witch as a way of providing a modern interpretation and critiquing those societies that rebellious, defiant, and marginal women were forced to confront. I argue, indeed, that far from adding further negative weight to the place of the witch, Hébert, Vassalli, Condé, and Sartre utilize her oppression to create positive and powerful witch characters.

As part of my own research on Anne Hébert and *Les Enfants du sabbat*, I traveled to the Université de Sherbrooke in Québec, Canada. At the *Centre Anne Hébert*, I was able to examine Hébert's personal library and explore recent articles and books published on *Les Enfants du sabbat*. What struck me during the course of my studies was how the majority of scholars who have written on Hébert's novel are divided, in the context of the novel, as to whether *soeur* Julie is meant to represent a veritable witch, or rather, and simply, a psychologically and emotionally damaged young woman. In chapter four, I concentrate on this problem. I argue that Hébert suggests that the idea of the witch forms part of a repudiated portion of our psyches. More importantly, I suggest that her protagonist's identity vacillates between witch and hysteric throughout the novel and that Hébert aims to write against any and all misogynistic paradigms and restrictive identity parameters. Using Sigmund Freud's research on hysteria and his association of the witch and the hysteric found in *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) and in

Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905), I demonstrate in the first part of the chapter how Hébert creates a witch-like character who seems to conform to Freud's definition. In the second part of the chapter, I turn to the arguments of Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément in *La Jeune Née* (1975) and utilize their analysis of how the witch and the hysteric differ to show how Hébert's witch-like character exhibits qualities that distinguish her from the hysteric. Given the complexity and variable nature of Hébert's character, I conclude that Hébert's "witch" challenges any notion of a stable and determined identity. I argue that *soeur* Julie defies simple constructions of identity by continually changing and exhibiting qualities that cause us to question whether she is a witch or a hysteric. I point out that the majority of scholars who have analyzed Hébert's novel have failed to recognize *soeur* Julie's hysteric qualities. Rather than create boundaries, I argue that Hébert suggests that *soeur* Julie is a fantastic and indeterminable character.

For my final chapter, I traveled to the University of Texas's Harry Ransom Center to examine Sartre's unpublished manuscript for *Les Sorcières de Salem* (1957). The scenario is an adaptation of the American Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953) and was used to create a film that starred Simone Signoret and Yves Montand. In 1956, the "House of Un-American Activities" questioned Miller about the association between

McCarthyism and the witch hunts. They argued that Miller meant to create a parallel between the Salem witch trials and the government investigations of alleged Communist subversion movements. While he denied any such associations, he was convicted of contempt of Congress in June of 1956 and was unable to produce a film version of *The Crucible* until the mid 1990s.

As I read Sartre's *Les Sorcières de Salem*, I was struck by the similarities between the witch characters and his existential ideals. In my fifth chapter, I examine witchcraft in the scenario through the lens of existentialism, utilizing Sartre's philosophical treatise, *L'Etre et le néant* (1943). Here, Sartre divides his account of human relations into two primary attitudes, the first including love and masochism, and the second including indifference, sexual desire, sadism, and hate. I argue that many of these tactics are present in witchcraft and examine the importance of objectification, the gaze, and the eyes. I conclude that accusations of witchcraft were often a means used by individuals in their attempt to recover their own identity by objectifying, dehumanizing, and stealing the Other's freedom.

The very fact that witches continue to appear in literary texts in the twentieth century is a testament to their appeal. Perhaps it is, as Jung believed, because the witch forms a part of our collective unconscious.

Whether or not we inherit the tendency to create these images, given the continued presence and fascination with the witch, it is clear that these diabolical female figures have left an indelible image that continues to interest both scholars and authors. Choosing the witch allows my twentieth-century authors to provide a modern interpretation of the witchcraft phenomenon that takes female sexuality, gender roles, and modern medical knowledge into account. It provides a means for the authors to rekindle past worlds in which superstitious beliefs were dominant and beliefs in the supernatural were ordinary; Sartre and Condé's witches are accused during the worst witch persecutions in the United States and Vassalli's novel is set in the superstitious environment of a rural seventeenth-century Italian village. In these settings, the authors reanalyze the witch while challenging the worlds and the belief systems that created them. They bring witches to the literary forefront and ask that they be re(dis)covered with modern eyes. While their representations of witchcraft vary, they offer a new understanding of the witch and a new analysis of witchcraft that demonstrates considerable research into historical accounts of actual trials.

For Sartre, Hébert, Condé, and Vassalli, the twentieth-century literary witch is a marginal creature that challenges the way we create and define ourselves. Rather than create witch-like characters who are evil, ugly old

women with green skin and black cats, perched upon broomsticks in front of harvest moons, these authors recognize and pay homage to the role that witches played in history. Instead of promoting the popular image of the witch, Sartre, Hébert, Condé, and Vassalli extend the witch's role by allowing her to embark on a new quest that aims to aid our understanding of modern identity formation. With the twentieth-century witch, Sartre, Hébert, Condé, and Vassalli explore how we create our identities and comment on who and what has influence over our developments.

In the chapters that follow, I will explore the way in which the witch character is a means for twentieth-century authors to investigate and demonstrate new theories of identity formation. Through the witch, Hébert, Condé, Sartre, and Vassalli explore how we define ourselves, how others define us, the nature of our relations with others, and the role that past experiences and memories have on our current existences. As we will see, these authors provide stories that deconstruct the very nature of the witch and show how witches expose the problems associated with understanding one's place in the world as both an individual and as a social being. The witch, for these authors, is a means by which to challenge dominant norms and reveal how much our identities are influenced by our interactions with other individuals. Because the witches in each text are marginal beings, they

expose the repressiveness of their particular environments and the idiosyncrasies of their cultures. At the same time, however, these authors contend that we, as modern readers, can relate to their situations and suggest that we can learn from their witches' stories. As we will see, they create their witch characters whose timeless qualities expose social injustices that continue to plague our societies today.

The witch figure is, of course, as I have indicated, is born well before the twentieth century, and while it is not my intention to analyze all portrayals of her over time, it is nonetheless instructive to trace at least in broad strokes the witch's literary development and evolution. If the *Malleus* delineates the qualities of the "modern witch," we must begin our study of the twentieth-century witch by examining its significance.

Chapter 1
What is the Witch?

The Creation of a Binary and the Influence of the *Malleus Maleficarum*

The *Malleus Maleficarum* offers a glimpse into the world of witchcraft and into the societies that believed in the supernatural, and it is perhaps the most important and most influential text on witchcraft ever written. The majority of modern witchcraft scholars suggest that the treatise provided an unequivocal wealth of knowledge for those associated with the witchcraft trials. The witchcraft historian Pennethorne Hughes suggests that it was "...the most important and terrible work on demonology ever written...a textbook for procedure: an official blueprint for the suppression of an underground movement against the Christian structure of medieval society."[32] In the book that accompanied the Bibliothèque Nationale's 1973 exposition on witches, Maxime Préaud writes that "Le *Malleus maleficarum* n'est pas le premier en date des ouvrages sur la sorcellerie, il n'est même pas le premier à être imprimé. Mais son rôle a été déterminant dans l'histoire de la littérature démonologique. Il a été de très nombreuses fois réédité, il est

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[32]Pennethorne Hughes, Introduction, *Malleus Maleficarum: The Hammer of Witchcraft*, by Heinrich Institoris and Jakob Sprenger (London: Folio Society, 1968) 11.

cité par tous les théoriciens de la démonolâtrie."[33] George L. Burr proposes that the *Malleus* was "the terrible book which...caused more suffering than any other written by human pen."[34] Etienne Dennery writes that the *Malleus* established the "code" for all witchcraft trials.[35] And Montague Summers, the English author and clergy man most known for translating the *Malleus* into English, contends that the treatise was "...the most solid, the most important work in the whole vast library of witchcraft" and suggests that "...later writers, great as they are, did little more than draw from the seemingly inexhaustible wells of wisdom."[36]

Treatises on witchcraft existed before the *Malleus*, but the invention of the printing press in the middle of the fifteenth century allowed Jacob Sprenger (1436 – 1494) and Heinrich Kramer (1430 - 1505) to disseminate their ideas with far greater effect than previous writings on the subject. From 1487 to 1669, the leading German, French, and Italian presses issued thirty editions of the treatise.[37] The main contributor to the *Malleus*, Heinrich Kramer or Institoris (his Latin name), was a theologian who had

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[33]Maxime Préaud, *Les Sorcières* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1973) 24.

[34]George L. Burr, "The Literature of Witchcraft," *American Historical Association* IV (1890): 54.

[35]Etienne Dennery, préface, *Les Sorcières*, (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1973) ix.

[36]Montague Summers, introduction, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, by Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer (London: The Folio Society, 1968) ix.

[37]Summers viii.

been appointed as an inquisitor for southern Germany in 1474. His partner, Sprenger, was a professor of theology at the University of Cologne and had received a similar appointment as inquisitor for the Rhineland in 1470. Prior to collaborating on the *Malleus*, the two had cooperated judicially in the prosecution of witches.

When Sprenger and Kramer met resistance from local ecclesiastical and secular authorities in their witchcraft prosecutions, they sought support in the form of a papal bull. Pope Innocent VIII answered the Dominicans plea in 1484. His *Summis desiderantes affectibus* (1484) recognized the existence of witches and provided the two inquisitors with the requisite authority to do away with them by whatever means. Two years later when Sprenger and Kramer produced the *Malleus*, they published the papal bull as the preface to their text. To further enhance the authority of the *Malleus* and their own credibility, Sprenger and Kramer also included an approbation from the faculty of the University of Cologne and letters of support from Maximilian I, the Holy Roman Emperor, who placed them under his protection.

Sprenger and Kramer used their treatise to engage in a battle against witches with clear objectives in mind. They wanted to refute critics who denied the reality of witchcraft, lend detailed assistance to judges who

attempted to convict those suspected of witchcraft, and offer advice to all religious authorities who were required to deal with the crime. They provided examples from many of the cases that they had personally adjudicated and virtually silenced all opposition with their academic rigor, cited authority, and copious references.

In their treatise, Sprenger and Kramer created a precise definition of the witch through six major claims that were innovative to witchcraft accusations and new to witchcraft treatises.[38] First, they posited that witches exist and that disbelief in their existence is heresy. With this claim, Sprenger and Kramer refuted previously held beliefs established by the Benedictine abbot Regino of Prüm. In the *Canon episcopi* (906) Prüm wrote that witchcraft was a fiction and contended that anyone who believed otherwise was openly in opposition to the teachings of the Catholic Church.[39] Sprenger and Kramer reversed thoughts on the matter by openly confirming the connection between witchcraft and heresy and contending that mere disbelief, skepticism, or doubt concerning the existence of witches was also heretical. They warned that "...whosoever thinks otherwise concerning these matters which touch the faith that the Holy Roman Church

[38] Kors and Peters 63.

[39] According to the witchcraft historian John Demos, the *Canon* was a moderate response and a "way station along the route" to the full-blown witch craze and to the "crimes" described in the *Malleus*. [John Demos, *The Enemy Within* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008) 22.]

holds is a heretic. There is the faith."[40] Making doubt concerning the reality of witchcraft heretical in itself enlarged the scope of possible heretical behavior. According to the Catholic Church's new stance, witches were real and dangerous beings who threatened mankind and anyone who believed that they did not exist was in danger of losing his salvation.

Sprenger and Kramer's second major claim was that all witches engage in harmful sorcery. In the *Malleus* they defined three types of witches: those who "injure but cannot cure," those who "cure but through some strange pact with the devil cannot injure," and those who "both injure and cure."[41] In *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews*, Sigrid Brauner provides a good analysis of the differences between Sprenger and Kramer's witch and those of earlier times. As Brauner points out, Sprenger and Kramer's modern witch differs sharply from traditional notions of sorceresses, wise women, and others endowed with supernatural powers that appear in medieval records and literature.[42] According to Sprenger and Kramer, all women who engaged in sorcery, regardless of their intent, were evil.

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[40]Sprenger and Kramer 4.

[41] Sprenger and Kramer 99.

[42] Brauner 7.

The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth claims were that witches should be persecuted under secular law, that the only sure remedy against witches was to massacre them, that witches tended to be women, not men, and that the witch's pact with the Devil was explicitly sexual. With these claims Sprenger and Kramer set down definitively what witches were (women), how they became witches (had sex with the Devil), and how they could be apprehended and executed (through secular courts).

Sprenger and Kramer believed that women were more likely to suffer from Satan's lure because they were "more superstitious," "more credulous," had "slippery tongues," and were "more likely to waver in their faith."[43] No previous demonologists had so blatantly conceived of witchcraft as essentially rooted in and defined by woman's character. Until the late 1400s, men were as likely as women to be charged with witchcraft. After the publication of the *Malleus*, however, the sex-specificity of witches was so widely accepted that it was implicitly assumed. To Sprenger and Kramer, witchcraft and women were crucially intertwined and after the *Malleus*, no work on the subject of witchcraft during the entire history of the European

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[43] See the *Malleus*, Part I Question VI. [Sprenger and Kramer 41-6.] Pierre de Lancre will use some of the same arguments in his *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons* (1612). He claims that women have a tendency to be more stubborn than men and that Satan captures their "flighty minds" more easily than those of men According to de Lancre, women are tempted by infidelity, ambition, vainglory, and lust. [Pierre de Lancre, *Tableau de l'Inconstance des Mauvais Anges et Démons* (Paris: Aubier, 1982) 83.]

witch hunts challenged the assumption that women were more likely than men to be witches.[44] Even the title of Sprenger and Kramer's treatise implied its gender-specificity; the term "maleficarum" refers to "female evildoers."[45] It was not the fact that witches were more likely to be women, however, that caused the greatest uproar. As the historian Hans Peter Broedel comments, "That witches were women was a conclusion that Institoris and Sprenger's contemporaries would not have found especially alarming...but what the authors of the *Malleus* did with this observation, how they explained it, and how they made it integral to their understandings of witchcraft was quite unusual indeed."[46]

Sprenger and Kramer's new definition of the witch was innovative and once their concept of witchcraft had been formulated and disseminated, it proved astonishingly durable. Because of the *Malleus*, the witch occupied very similar conceptual spaces in the minds of authorities worldwide and the variegated definitions of witches became homogeneous in the eyes of theologians and ecclesiastical prosecutors. In *La Démonomanie des Sorciers* (1593), the French jurist and political philosopher Jean Bodin comments on

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[44] Brauner 48.

[45] For a discussion of the evolution of the term maleficium, see Broedel 132-8. [Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003) 132-8.]

[46] Broedel 176.

the fact that witches displayed similar traits worldwide. He writes "On voit en cela que tous ceux qu'on a bruslé en Italie, en Allemagne, et en France s'accordent de poinct en poinct."[47] Pierre de Lancre, the seventeenth-century French judge who conducted one of the most well-known witch hunts in France's Labourd region comments on their universality noting that "On a observé de tout temps qu'il y a plus de femmes Sorcières que d'hommes. Ce qui se voit clairement dans les Poètes Grecs, Latins, Italiens, et Français..."[48] Moreover, nearly every witchcraft treatise and history of witchcraft written after the *Malleus* mentions the treatise. Pierre de Lancre, gives the Dominicans a proverbial nod in his *Tableau de l'Inconstance des Mauvais Anges et Démons* (1612) and makes it known that he read the *Malleus* and was familiar with Sprenger and Kramer when he writes "Et en notre âge de récente mémoire, on a vu des apparitions nocturnes des chasseurs qui criaient...dont fait mention Spranger."[49] Henri Boguet, the seventeenth-century inquisitor from the Burgandy region of France known for his extreme measures of torture, cites the *Malleus* so often in *Discours Excréable des Sorciers* (1590) that it is obvious that he looked to it as a source of wisdom. In the preface to his text, Boguet even admits that he

[47] Jean Bodin, *La Démonomanie des sorciers* (Paris: J du Puys, 1587) 20.

[48] de Lancre 89.

[49] de Lancre 223.

"imite en cecy la pluspart de ceux qui ont escrit devant moy,"[50] an admission that leads the witchcraft scholar Maxime Préaud to state that "la sincérité de Boguet semble confirmée et justifiée par les auteurs dont il s'inspire et qu'il cite abondamment: le *Marteau des sorcieres* d'abord."[51] And even modern authors turn to the *Malleus*. Michelet admits that he began his study of the history of witchcraft with the Dominican witch treatises, writing that "Sur la longue voie de mon Histoire, dans les trente ans que j'y ai consacrés, cette horrible littérature de sorcellerie m'a passé fréquemment par les mains. J'ai épuisé d'abord les manuels de l'inquisition, les âneries des dominicains."[52] He goes on to claim that witchcraft treatises "...ont atteint leur perfection dans le *Malleus*" and notes that it "...resta pour un siècle le guide et la lumière des tribunaux d'inquisition."[53]

Sprenger and Kramer's definition and representation of witchcraft also continue to influence literary representations of witchcraft to this day. Whether or not Sartre, Hébert, Condé, and Vassalli read the *Malleus* and other traditional witchcraft treatises in their entirety is not clear, but they all mention the early witchcraft treatises in their novels. In the prologue to *Les*

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[50] Henry Boguet, *Discours des Sorciers* (Marseille: Laffitte Reprints, 1979) Aii.

[51] Préaud 2.

[52] Michelet 34.

[53] Michelet 151.

Sorcières de Salem, Sartre writes "Un livre parut. Un livre sur le Démon. Chacun voulut le lire: sûrement leurs malheurs venaient de Satan."[54] Moreover, in the scenario, Sartre demonstrates the importance and authority of the witchcraft treatises. In one scene, his stage directions indicate that the Reverend Hale should go to "...la table où sont posés ses livres...[and mettre] la main dessus..." and then reassure those present that "Les marques de la présence du Diable sont connues et précises. Grâce à ces livres si Satan est parmi nous, je le trouverai et je jure de l'écraser."[55] In *Moi, Tituba sorcière noire de Salem*, Condé provides a similar description. She writes that Dr. Griggs "...posa sur une table une série de gros livres reliés de cuir, qu'il ouvrit à des pages soigneusement annotées et se mit à lire avec le plus grand sérieux."[56] In *La Chimera*, Vassalli's Inquisitor Manini has written his own witch treatise, a treatise that Vassalli describes as "un opuscolo, se lo confrontiamo con la maggior parte dei trattati."[57] In his description of the particularities of Manini's treatise, Vassalli laments the lingering effects of other witchcraft treatises and expresses regret that woodworms and

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[54] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem*. Unpublished manuscript, U of Texas, Austin, E.

[55] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 63.

[56] Maryse Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986)128.

[57] Sebastiano Vassalli, *La Chimera* (Torino: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1990) 308.

catastrophe did not ruin the writings.[58] In *Les Enfants du sabbat*, Hébert provides the most detailed description of the witchcraft treatises and mentions several of them by name. She writes that her demonologist, Léo-Z. Flageole, uses "quelques livres, lus et relus" including "le *Malleus Maleficarum*...avec les ouvrages des plus célèbres démonologues, comme Bodin, Boguet et de Lancre" to help him confirm the Devil's presence among Les Dames du Précieux Sang.[59]

The fact that Hébert, Sartre, Vassalli, and Condé explicitly reference the *Malleus* and other treatises in their texts is not surprising. When we examine their representations of witchcraft, we realize that they adopt many of the defining characteristics of Sprenger and Kramer's witch. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, Hébert, Sartre, Vassalli, and Condé rely heavily on the treatise and construct their witch characters in accordance with the historical particularities of the witch as described by the *Malleus*.

The first tenent of Sprenger and Kramer's arguments in the *Malleus* that the twentieth-century authors adopt is that "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable..."[60] Sprenger and Kramer

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[58] Vassalli writes that witchcraft treatises "scaricare sui suoi posteri e che i tarli et le catastrofi ancora non sono riusciti a togliere di mezzo." [Vassalli, *La Chimera* 308.]

[59] Anne Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975) 101.

[60] Sprenger and Kramer 47.

believed that witches worked through "the privy parts of men" because they were "hot to satisfy their filthy lusts."[61] This belief in the indelible sexuality of the witch was perhaps the most important and the most innovative claim of the Dominicans' treatise. According to the two Dominicans, witches used their unbridled sexual drives to incline "the minds of men to inordinate passion because "of all struggles those are the hardest."[62] To Sprenger and Kramer, witches were women who seduced men and led them down sensual and corrupting paths of sin. Their view of witches was a chilling and intriguing allusion to that of Eve in the Garden of Eden.[63] Like Eve offering an apple to Adam and thereby prompting his sin, the two Dominicans believed that witches were the worldly link that connected the Devil to men. They suggested that the Devil could not operate without "the assistance of some agent"[64] and claimed that he needed these Eves/witches to fulfill his evil tasks.[65] They maintained that witches succeeded in corrupting men

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[61] Sprenger and Kramer 47.

[62] Sprenger and Kramer 46.

[63] They write "For though the devil tempted Eve to sin, yet Eve seduced Adam. And as the sin of Eve would not have brought death to our soul and body unless the sin had afterwards passed on to Adam, to which he was tempted by Eve, not by the devil, therefore she is more bitter than death. ... More bitter than death because bodily death is an open and terrible enemy, but woman is a wheedling and secret enemy." [Sprenger and Kramer 47.]

[64] Sprenger and Kramer 11.

[65] They claim "the Catholic truth is this...to bring about evils...witches and the devil always work together...one can do nothing without the aid and assistance of the other." [Spernger and Kramer 18.]

because they were "beautiful to look at" and "contaminating to the touch" with voices that "entice passerbys and kill them…by causing them to forsake God."[66]

Sprenger and Kramer were not the only inquisitors to make this comparison. In *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons*, for example, Pierre de Lancre compared the Labourd women to Eve, and explained their witchcraft tendencies by stating that the women

> …ne mangent que pommes, ne boivent que jus de pommes, qui est occasion qu'elles mordent si volontiers à cette pomme de transgression, qui fit outrepasser le commandement de Dieu, et franchir la prohibition à notre premier père. Ce sont des Èves qui séduisent volontiers les enfants d'Adam, et nues par la tête, vivant parmi les montagnes en toute liberté et naïveté comme faisait Ève dans le paradis terrestre, elles écoutent et hommes et Démons…[67]

With these words, de Lancre implied that the Labourd women experienced a freedom that was exemplified through their wild hair and liberty to roam in an untamed wilderness. Moreover, when de Lancre employs the word

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[66] Sprenger and Kramer 46.

[67] de Lancre 84.

"seduce" here, he implies that this is a sexual seduction. In this portion of his text, he writes at length about seduction and describes women as enticing, noting that "l'habit des femmes et des filles, même leur coiffures" are "aucunement impudiques."[68] He writes that the Labourd women have hair that seems to testify to their desires and claims that the women show off their rear ends so much that all of the ornamentation of their pleated cotillions is in the back. He even contends that they lift up their dresses so that the ornamentation is noticed. Like Eve and like the definition of the witch established in the *Malleus*, the Labourd women seduce men with their illicit and enticing sexualities.[69]

The witch was an oversexed woman who was congenitally unable to control her desires and consequently tempted man. According to Sprenger and Kramer the witch was also so sexually charged that she could not help but engage in sexual relations with the Devil.[70] The two Dominicans were the first to make the witch's sexual relationship with the Devil an explicit and defining characteristic. They were obsessed with sex, with the size of the Devil's sexual organs, and with witches' ability to cause impotence in

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[68] de Lancre 84.

[69] See de Lancre 82-5.

[70] Sprenger and Kramer 47.

men.[71] Many witchcraft scholars have focused on the gendered specificity of the *Malleus*, on its unfair treatment of women, and on Sprenger and Kramer's infatuation with sexuality. Moira Smith points out that the majority of the crimes attributed to witches including copulation with devils, procuring abortions, causing sterility and stillbirth, and impeding sexual relations between husbands and wives were directly related to female sexuality and to the Dominicans' obsession with male sexual performance.[72] Broedel writes that defining witches according to sexualized criteria allowed Sprenger and Kramer to create a new conceptual field in which "...sexuality [was] identified with the devil, inverted gender roles and sexual dysfunction with witchcraft, and defective social and political hierarchies with women and women's sins."[73] In his study of the visual representation of witches, Lorenzo Lorenzi links accusations of witchcraft to female sexuality and argues that the women accused of witchcraft were the women who challenged male interests. He writes "As demi-goddess, mater matuta, artificer, disrupter of the male hierarchy of power, she attracted widespread interest as a woman seeking to assert her feminine being by using all the

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[71] Sprenger and Kramer 99.

[72] Moira Smith, "The Flying Phallus and the Laughing Inquisitor: Penis Theft in the *Malleus Maleficarum*," *Journal of Folklore Research* 39.1 (2002): 88.

[73]Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003) 179.

tools at her disposal, her psychic powers and her charm and beauty, the latter being the vehicle for conveying her sexuality."[74] And in *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*, Walter Stephens contends that "...sex with demons was only one aspect of a more general European fixation on physical interaction with demons."[75]

In the twentieth-century narratives of witchcraft, Sartre, Hébert, Condé, and Vassalli emphasize the sexual practices of their witch protagonists. In *Les Sorcières de Salem*, John struggles to control his sexual longings for Abigail.[76] In *Les Enfants du sabbat*, *soeur* Julie burns with passion for her brother. In *La Chimera*, Antonia engages in nocturnal trysts with a secret lover that she refuses to denounce. And in *Moi, Tituba sorcière noire de Salem*, Tituba is so sexually charged that when John Indien refuses to make love to her for the first time since their marriage she states "Je me tordis, brûlante, à ses côtés, cherchant de la main, l'objet qui m'avait

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[74]Lorenzo Lorenzi, *Devils in Art: Florence, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, trans. Mark Roberts (Florence: Centro Di, 1997) 7.

[75]Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) 14.

[76] Many of the women accused of witchcraft in Sartre's screenplay are associated with sex. Putnam explains that Sarah Osburne "vit en concubinage avec William Osburn" (76). When Mercy dances with Tituba in the woods, Sartre describes her as sexually excited "Mercy ... devient rapidement lubrique et relève sa jupe" (58). Right before Elisabeth is accused of witchcraft, Sartre writes that she is aroused and "fascinée par la violence sexuelle qu'elle imagine... Elle a l'air obscène et presque terrifiante par ce que la chasteté, la maladresse et le désir s'expriment en même temps sur son visage" (89).

procuré tant de délices."[77] In Condé's description, Tituba objectifies her husband and writhes in anguish in bed next to him. As in the Dominicans' treatise, the witches in twentieth-century literature burn with passion and have trouble controlling their sexual desires.

When Hébert, Sartre, Vassalli, and Condé expose and recreate the *Malleus*'s misogynistic rhetoric, they demonstrate the extent to which such texts attempted to both control and contain female sexuality. As I will demonstrate more thoroughly in subsequent chapters, the authors make it clear that their witches stand outside of "acceptable" sexual practices and outside of "acceptable" identity parameters. *Soeur* Julie, Antonia, John, and Tituba explore and relish in their own sexual desires while ignoring the ascetic mores and the strict moral and religious codes of their communities. Their witches demonstrate how societies that were preoccupied with the male hierarchical order defined its converse as female unrestrained sexuality and disorder. Their accounts of witchcraft suggest that the hunting of witches was crucially intertwined with the hunting of "loose" women. Through their texts these authors prove that the fear of witches reflected a sharpened fear and distrust of women as powerful sources of danger, disorder, and pollution.

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[77]Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 49.

The twentieth-century authors make it clear that their witches are the victims of the majority of the sexual encounters in the texts. While Hébert and Vassalli utilize Sprenger and Kramer's description of the typical sabbat and suggest that their witch protagonists engage in a sexual relationship with the Devil, for example, they also demonstrate that their witches are unjustly forced to participate in the sexual acts. Sprenger and Kramer believed that the sabbat was a defining moment in every witch's career because it was there that she engaged in a sexual relationship with the Devil. According to popular belief, the witch also received the infamous "stigma diaboli" that marked her allegiance to maleficia. Much like a cowboy branding his cattle to claim them as his own, the Devil branded his witches with an insensitive mark that would not bleed when punctured. The stigma diaboli was proof of association with the Devil and if inquisitors could find the mark on the body of a suspected witch, it ensured the success of their case. De Lancre argued that the mark is of great importance to the adjudication of the crime of witchcraft and suggested that it provides the requisite proof of a witch's evil association. He writes "...je crois que la marque que Satan imprime à ses suppôts, est de grande considération pour le jugement du crime de sorcellerie...les marques sont indices si forts...qu'étant jointes avec d'autres

indices il est loisible de passer à leur condamnation."[78] According to de Lancre, Satan marked witches to prove his authority and convince them that they must turn to him to receive all of their power.[79]

In his book *A Deed Without a Name: The Witch in Society and History*, Andrew Sanders provides a description of the standard sabbat. He writes that

> The Devil presided over the sabbat in a form half man and half goat. The witches made homage to him and repeated their renunciation of Christianity, and the Devil delivered a sermon in a blasphemous parody of divine service. The witches adored him by kissing his anus – the notorious *osculum infame*. There followed a meal of revolting substances – a parody of the Christian eucharist. The meeting ended with a sexual orgy that involved incest, sodomy, and intercourse in the manner of animals, while the Devil copulated with everyone in turn. Finally the assembly broke up, and the witches returned home

[78] De Lancre 178.

[79] De Lancre writes "...le Diable les marque pour leur montrer sa puissance...il leur veut aussi persuader par là, qu'il est le vrai maître de leur mal et de leur bien, et qu'ils n'en doivent attendre d'autre que de lui." [De Lancre 179-80.]

> enjoined to commit every possible form of *maleficium* against their Christian neighbors.[80]

Not only did witches have sexual intercourse with the Devil, they also mocked Christian practices, engaged in libertinage, and mated like animals.

In *La Chimera*, Vassalli replicates the description of the Domincans' sabbat. Don Teresio and the other townspeople accuse Antonia of having trysts with the Devil.[81] Pirin Panchet provides the best description of the nocturnal meetings and of the Devil, noting that he is a tall and thin man with black hair, dark skin, and legs and hoofs like those of a billy-goat. He claims that Antonia and two other women kissed the Devil's arse and then "made use of" his privates which he describes as larger than normal and purple in color.[82]

In *Les Enfants du sabbat*, Hébert's description of the sabbat also mirrors Sprenger and Kramer's vision. The participants engage in a mock religious ceremony where they pay homage to Philomène, dance, and fornicate until morning. During the festivities, the Devil has sex with *soeur* Julie to initiate her into the world of witchcraft. Like in the *Malleus*'s

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[80] Sanders 151.

[81] Vassalli, *La Chimera* 257.

[82] Pirin Panchet claims "Ho visto... le Vergogne del Diavolo...grandi più del normale et di colore Pavonazzo. Servendosi di quelle Vergogne, il Diavolo s'era poi accoppiato con tutt'e tre le donne..." [Vassalli, *La Chimera* 270.]

definition of witchcraft, Hébert's witch derives all of her power from her sexual encounter with the Devil. But instead of engaging in the sexual relations because she cannot control her sexuality, Hébert makes it clear that *soeur* Julie is forcibly and violently raped. Hébert writes that the Devil "...prit dans sa main son sexe tout gonflé et le mit de force dans le petit sexe de la fillette qui hurla de douleur. Le diable, de ses mains velues, étouffa les cris de la petite fille. Il lui promit d'une voix à peine audible, de lui accorder tout ce qu'elle voudrait."[83] *Soeur* Julie is awakened and forced to engage in sexual relations against her will and Hébert describes the encounter in a way that emphasizes the protagonist's victimization.

Vassalli and Hébert make it clear that their "witches" are victims of the sabbat. They do not seek the Devil to satiate their sexual desires and do not try to use their sexuality to control male interests. In fact, the twentieth-century authors suggest the opposite; their witches are prey to male sexual fantasies. First, in Vassalli and Hébert's novels, both Antonia and *soeur* Julie are physically abused and dehumanized while male inquisitors search their bodies for their stigma diabolis.

[83] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 45.

As stated above, the stigma diaboli or Devil's mark was proof that witches had made an explicit pact with the Devil.[84] Because the mark was not visible and overtly obvious, inquisitors meticulously examined suspected witches by stabbing them with needles to try and find an insensitive portion of their skin that did not bleed when the needle's sharp edge plunged into their supple flesh. In *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons*, de Lancre gives advice to inquisitors who attempt to search for the mark. He writes that

> Satan les donne à cachettes, et les ayant même empreintes, les ensevelit et cache en telle partie et endroit du corps, qu'il faudrait mettre ce même corps en pièces pour la trouver: Voire pour éluder la justice et ses Officiers, il les imprime souvent, ou en des parties si sales qu'on a horreur de les y aller chercher: comme dans le fondement de l'homme, ou la nature de la femme: ou bien comme il est extrême et dénaturé, au lieu le plus noble et le plus précieux qui soit en toute la personne: ou il

[84] Vassalli explains the importance of the *stigma diaboli* for those who accused Antonia of witchcraft stating that "I corpi abitati dal Diavolo, si sa, presentano spesso zone torpide; e da ciò appunto si riconoscono." [Vassalli, *La Chimera* 342.]

> semble impossible de l'imprimer, comme ès yeux, ou dans la bouche.[85]

De Lancre explains that Satan hides the marks on purpose and that they are so difficult to find that the inquistors must examine every crevice of the suspected witches' bodies. During this search, if they are able find a spot on the alleged witch's body that does not pour blood when it encounters the needle, the inquisitors have proof of the woman's association with the Devil.

In *La Chimera* and *Les Enfants du sabbat*, Vassalli and Hébert's witch characters must undergo torturous examinations. Their literary witches are thoroughly examined in a process that is cruel, long, and inhumane. Because they know that the process is lengthy and painful, those who examine *soeur* Julie decide to tie her to the bed while she is still asleep before they begin their inspection. Hébert paints a disturbing portrait of *soeur* Julie during the process; she writes that the witch protagonist is bound, shaven, and so brutally searched that she loses the ability to speak. She writes "Cheveux tondus, sourcils, aisselles et pubis rasés, *soeur* Julie crache comme un chat en colère."[86] Instead of crying out and communicating, the witch protagonist can only spit to express her disgust as her persecutors

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[85] De Lancre 179.

[86] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 179.

pierce her body with needles for hours upon end.[87] Through her description, Hébert suggests that those who inspect the witch protagonist treat her like a wild animal.

In *La Chimera*, Vassalli's likens Antonia's inspection to a rape scene. We learn that Taddeo conducts a minute inspection of Antonia's naked body and is so thorough that he looks under Antonia's tongue and in all of the most intimate parts of her body. Conforming to de Lancre's advice, Vassalli writes "Le si guardava sotto la lingua e tra le natiche; le si aprivano le gambe a viva forza, e l'aguizzino, o il frate stesso, verificava con le dita che tutto fosse in regola anche in quelle parti più segrete del corpo."[88] Taddeo searches Antonia's body as if he were making love to her. He begins with her mouth, opens her legs, and then penetrates all of her orifices. And it is obvious that he enjoys the process – Vassalli writes that Taddeo won the "privilege" by tossing for it with his son.

Male inquisitors violate and explore Antonia and *soeur* Julie's naked bodies as they search for proof of their associations with the Devil. The searches, as Vassalli points out with his description, are a form of sexual

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[87] Hébert describes the inspection writing "Minutieuse et persévérante, mère Marie-Clothilde pique des aiguilles dans tout le corps de sœur Julie...elle recherche la marque d'insensibilité compromettante. Les heures passent. La chair de sœur Julie réagit normalement, souffre, saigne lorsqu'on la pique. Très tard, dans la nuit...la marque sortilège est découverte... Aucune sensibilité, ni goutte de sang..." [Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 179.]

[88] Vassalli, *La Chimera* 320.

assault. The witches are threatened by the overwhelming force and violence of their perpetrators. They are the tied down, gagged, and naked subjects of their male inquisitors' desire for power and sexual gratification.

Even these inhumane inspections seem minimal when we compare them to the extreme violation of the witches' bodies that occurs during the various rape scenes in the twentieth-century texts. In three of the four novels, the witches are brutally and violently raped. In *Les Enfants du sabbat*, Hébert's witch is forced to have sex with the Devil at the sabbat, but she is also raped continuously by her father. *Soeur* Julie describes the rapes stating that "Il ne me meance plus de me tuer si je crie...il aime que je crie."[89] Alone in the woods, *soeur* Julie's father violates her again and again. She cries out, but her father ignores her pleas. In *La Chimera*, Antonia is raped and tortured simultaneously while she is in prison. Bernando and his father force her to have sex with them with a torture device in her mouth so that she cannot scream. Vassalli writes that the two "possessed her again and again" because they could not stand the thought of her "cunt" having it off with the devils.[90] And in *Moi, Tituba sorcière noire*

[89] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 64.

[90] Vassalli, *La Chimera* 378.

de Salem, Condé is violently raped by the Puritan men who want her to accuse others of witchcraft. Tituba explains

> L'un des hommes se mit carrément à cheval sur moi et commença de me marteler le visage de ses poings, durs comme pierres. Un autre releva ma jupe et enfonça un bâton taillé en pointe dans la partie la plus sensible de mon corps en raillant : - Prends, prends, c'est la bite de John Indien ![91]

Rather than fornicate with Satan in exchange for absolute knowledge, the witches in each novel are forced to engage in sexual acts against their wills while they are brutally beaten and mocked.

In these scenes, the twentieth-century authors emphasize the eroticization of power and its fusion with gender. Tituba, Antonia, and *soeur* Julie are the subordinate objects of sexuality and must acquiesce to the gender hierarchy. The rapes are demonstrations of violent and unequal sex and the witches are forced and tortured to ensure their compliance. Through such scenes, Condé, Hébert, and Vassalli highlight the way in which sexuality is practiced against their witches in favor of male objectives. In the twentieth-century novels, rape and other sexual abuses are a condition of the witches' sexual identities.

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[91] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 146.

Sprenger and Kramer believed that women could be "good" if they were like the "...virgins and other holy women who have by faith led nations away from the worship of idols to the Christian religion."[92] Even though they argued that women were more prone to engage in witchcraft, Sprenger and Kramer suggested that when women are "governed by a good spirit, they are most excellent in virtue."[93] By renouncing their bodies in the image of the Virgin, Sprenger and Kramer believed that women could defeat the Devil and hope for salvation.

Sprenger and Kramer thus set the stereotype of the witch as a negative standard for women and created a binary view of sexuality that opposed the witch with the Virgin.[94] Their description of the witch served to emphasize and define by inversion the acceptable social role for women, and it set limits that women were not to transgress. Whatever a witch was, a good and respectable woman was not.

Like Sprenger and Kramer, the twentieth-century representations of witchcraft construct dichotomies between the two main female characters

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[92] Sprenger and Kramer write "Blessed is the man who has a virtuous wife, for the number of his days shall be doubled." [Sprenger and Kramer 43.]

[93] Sprenger and Kramer 42.

[94] Many scholars only read specific parts of the *Malleus* and assume that Sprenger and Kramer suggest that all women are fated to become witches. While Sprenger and Kramer do argue that women are more prone to witchcraft, they draw sharp distinctions between witches and virtuous, religious women.

that highlight two absolutes of female sexuality. In *Moi, Tituba sorcière noire de Salem*, Tituba and Elizabeth are opposites. While Tituba enjoys and relishes in her sexuality, Elizabeth tells Tituba that she is "Bienheureuse si tu crois qu'un mari peut être un compagnon plaisant et si le contact de sa main ne te fait pas courir un frisson le long du dos."[95] Unlike Tituba, Elizabeth associates sex with sin. This is perhaps best exemplified in a conversation between the two. Tituba begins

> - Que dit votre rigide époux devant cette transformation de votre corps ?
>
> Elle éclata de rire :
>
> - Ma pauvre Tituba, comment veux-tu qu'il s'en aperçoive ? ...
>
> - J'aurais pensé que nul n'est mieux placé que lui pour le faire !
>
> Elle rit plus fort :
>
> - Si tu savais ! Il me prend sans ôter ni mes vêtements ni les siens, pressé d'en finir avec cet acte odieux...
>
> - Odieux ? Pour moi, c'est le plus bel acte du monde...
>
> - Tais-toi, tais-toi ! C'est l'héritage de Satan en nous.[96]

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[95]Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 67.

[96]Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 73.

This dialogue emphasizes the differences in the sexual value systems of the two main female characters. They have conflicting perceptions and Elizabeth's experience in the bedroom differs significantly from Tituba's. Rather than enjoy sex, Elizabeth views it as sin.

In *Les Sorcières de Salem*, *La Chimera*, and *Les Enfants du sabbat*, Sartre, Vassalli, and Hébert overtly compare their witch protagonists with the Virgin. In *Les Sorcières de Salem*, Elisabeth, John Proctor's wife, is the chaste and virtuous female who is reminiscent of the Virgin and "aime trop la vertu."[97] In *Les Enfants du sabbat*, when *soeur* Julie becomes pregnant while living in the convent, the other nuns cannot help but think of the Virgin.

- Mon Dieu, quel miracle est-ce là ? Quel rêve ! Pourquoi sœur Julie ? Pourquoi pas moi?
- Et moi ?
- Et moi ? Cet enfant, elle l'a fait toute seule, sans le secours d'aucun homme.
- Vous savez bien que ce n'est pas possible, ma sœur.
- La Vierge Marie l'a bien fait, elle![98]

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[97] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 33.

[98] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 183.

The other nuns are jealous of sœur Julie's pregnancy. They compare her with the Virgin and even wonder if *soeur* Julie might give birth to a new Messiah. In *La Chimera*, when Bertolino, a travelling painter creates a fresco of Antonia as the Virgin the townspeople are horrified. They cannot accept the melding of their witch with the holy Virgin, view the painting of Antonia as a pictorial oxymoron, and demand that it be destroyed.

The modern representations of witchcraft that we find in Sartre, Hébert, Condé, and Vassalli thus continue to define the witch as a sexual being who stands opposite a virtuous, chaste, and religious woman. The persistence of this patriarchal definition of the witch is proof of the influence that societal discourses like the *Malleus* can hold. Unlike the authors of the *Malleus*, however, Sartre, Hébert, Condé, and Vassalli make use of these attributes of the witch to undermine received discourse on power, sexuality, and women. While they emphasize their protagoists' sexualities and allow them to fit the established definition of the witch, they also create characters that embrace their own sexual drives and are therefore detached from the other women in the narratives. As I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, Hébert, Vassalli, and Condé suggest that their "witches" were females who laid claim to their own sexualities and tried to extend the patriarchal boundaries that constricted their sexual desires. With their narratives, they

demonstrate the extent to which feminine sexuality had to confront the myth of "woman" and all cultural discourses that sought to frame and negate feminine desire.

When they hint at the association of their witch characters with the Virgin, the twentieth-century authors demonstrate the ridiculousness of the binary view of sexuality that suggests that women must either be religious and chaste like the Virgin or sexually charged like the witch. Vassalli makes light of the comparison between Antonia and the Virgin writing that Antonia is a "devout witch." He jokes "E chissà anche quante preghiere sono state dette, davanti a quelle rappresentazioni devote d'una strega!"[99] But Lori Saint-Martin, Stanley Pean, and Gabrielle Poulin believe that comparing the witch with the Virgin sends a potent message to readers. Saint-Martin argues that the comparison allows these authors to create new and more complete women. She explains that "La sorcière permet ainsi de réunir et de transcender des stéréotypes opposés (Marie et Eve, la Vierge et la pécheresse) et de donner naissance à de nouveaux types de femmes plus incarnes et plus complets."[100] Pean also believes that the comparison of the Virgin and the witch allows women to transcend traditional female

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[99] Vassalli, *La Chimera* 129.

[100] Lori Saint-Martin, *Contre-Voix : Essais de critique au féminin* (Québec: Nuit Blanche Editeur, 1977) 182.

boundaries. He writes "En subvertissant ainsi, irrémédiablement, le modèle proposé par le Pouvoir patriarcal, elle fait éclater les images reçues de la femme exprimées par la figure du triptyque vierge/mère/putain."[101] And Poulin points out that Hébert's witch represents the melding of traditionally irreconcilable identities. She writes that "...sœur Julie de la Trinité, se rencontrent étroitement unies, comme son nom l'indique, l'amante, la petite sœur religieuse, et la sorcière, comme la terre, le ciel, et l'enfer."[102]

While their replication of Sprenger and Kramer's beliefs reveal that they were aware of the historical particularities of the witch, the twentieth-century narratives of witchcraft demonstrate that the defined attributes of female sexuality as well as the Dominicans' description of witches are the antiquated and unreasonable remnants of a misogynistic view of women. They point out the victimization of their witch characters and suggest that their witches are prey to male sexual fantasies. In the *Malleus*, Sprenger and Kramer defined and described a feminine nature, established a strong link meant to bind woman to her physical body, and sought to control and limit female sexuality. Because they use and undermine the *Malleus*'s biased rhetoric, Sartre, Hébert, Vassalli, and Condé participate in a reconstruction

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[101]Stanley Pean, "Anne Hébert, la transgression," *Solaris* 94.4 (1990): 30.

[102] Gabrielle Poulin. "La Nouvelle Héloïse québécoise: une lecture des *Enfants du sabbat*," *Relations* 36.413 (1976) : 92.

and revalorization of the witch. While Hébert, Sartre, Vassalli, and Condé explore the construction of witchcraft and of witches and reproduce many of the *Malleus*'s claims, they also uncover the inherent and contradictory ideas that shaped the Dominicans' arguments and create new witch characters that defy their boundaries.

Chapter 2
Who is the Witch?

The Evolution of the Literary Witch: From Marie de France to André Breton

As I demonstrated in chapter one, Sprenger and Kramer's description of the witch in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487) continues to influence the literary representation of the witch in the twentieth century. In *Moi, Tituba sorcière noire de Salem*, *La Chimera*, *Les Enfants du sabbat*, and *Les Sorcières de Salem*, the twentieth-century authors adopt many of Sprenger and Kramer's major claims. Prior to the publication and dissemination of the *Malleus*, however, this was not the case. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, when we examine literary texts written prior to the *Malleus*, the witch is a benevolent healer who helps to alleviate pain and suffering.

In the Middle Ages, literary texts influenced by the marvelous created a supernatural element that favored a paranormal and mystical world view. In its Old French and Provençal origins the word "merveille" (marvelous) meant a miracle, that which caused surprise or astonishment. The marvelous literary genre, like the term itself, created an environment that caused wonder and inspired curiosity. In *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970), Tzvetan Todorov defines the marvelous as a genre that "...correspond à un phénomène inconnu, encore jamais vu" in which the

reader "...doit admettre de nouvelles lois de la nature, par lesquelles le phénomène peut être expliqué."[103] The marvelous, he contends, requires the reader to accept the unknown and admit the existence of a world that operates in a completely different manner than our own. In this alternate and astonishing world, the characters defy natural laws, accomplish supernatural actions, and participate in mystical experiences.

In the marvelous, the witch-like figure found her place among fairies, talking animals, individuals that abandoned their human form to take on an animal persona, inanimate objects that could come to life, and the superhuman feats that made up the story lines. Marie de France, one of the best known writers of the marvelous genre, includes a witch character in her *Lais*. In *Les Deux Amants*, which was written near the end of the twelfth century, she introduces a benevolent witch-like character who creates a magic potion that should allow her two lovers to wed. In the story, a controlling king refuses to allow his daughter to marry any man who cannot carry her out of the city and to the top of a local mountain without stopping for a break. The daughter, realizing that such a feat requires supernatural prowess, suggests that her lover visit a witch-like relative to ask her help.

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[103]Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970) 46-7.

She describes the witch-like character stating "J'ai une parente à Salerne: c'est une femme riche, qui a de très grands revenus. Elle est là-bas depuis trente ans. Elle a tant pratiqué l'art de médecine qu'elle connaît bien les herbes et les racines; elle est très experte en remèdes. ... Elle prendra des mesures pour vous aider."[104] Marie de France's witch possesses an extensive medical knowledge that she utilizes to help others. When the young man visits the witch-like character, she offers him a magic drink that should allow him to accomplish the impossible task. Unfortunately, his lips never touch the panacea. Instead, he overexerts himself, collapses, and dies. Rather than depict her witch character as a threatening figure who impedes the union of the two lovers or as a woman who engages in a sexual relationship with the Devil to satisfy her sexual hunger, Marie de France's *lai* highlights the frustration and trouble that pride can cause in amorous situations. If the young lover had utilized the magic potion, he would have been able to accomplish the superhuman feat demanded of him and the two lovers would have been allowed to wed. To do this, however, the man would have had to dismiss the ideals of courtly love and submit to a female supernatural power.

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[104] Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Newark:Linguatext Ltd., 1991) 27.

Witches also utilize their powers in amorous situations in *Amadas et Ydoine* (1190-1220). In this Anglo-Norman romance written by an anonymous author, the female protagonist Ydoine visits with three women that she names "sorcières" and begs that they help her in her plight. She is in love with Amadas but is supposed to wed the Count of Nevers. The three witches assure Ydoine that they possess magic powers that allow them to resurrect the dead, transform peoples' appearances, and make men dream anything they want, among other things. They respond to Ydoine's desperate situation by calling on the Count of Nevers in the middle of the night and convincing him that he should not consummate his marriage with Ydoine. If he consummates his marriage, they claim, he will die within a year. The Count is in an unsettled state during the encounter with the witches and does not know "se il dort ou non / ou c'est songe u vision,"[105] but he is so frightened that he agrees to refrain from sexual intercourse with the protagonist. Thanks to these benevolent witches, Ydoine and Amadas are eventually able to wed.

Chrétien de Troyes, a French trouvère from the twelfth century, also creates a witch-like character who tries to help desperate lovers. In *Cligès* (1176), Thessala prepares two magic potions for Fénice so that she can

[105] *Amadas et Ydoine* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 2007) 2111-12.

escape her marriage to Alis and live with Cligès. The first magic potion gives Alis the impression that he has consummated his marriage to Fénice. The second "boivre" allows Fénice to appear dead. When Alis learns that his wife is deceased, he buries her. Later that night, however, Thessala uncovers Fénice's inanimate corpse and utilizes her medical knowledge to revive her charge. Fénice leaves her grave, immediately finds Cligès, and lives secretly with him.

In both *Amadas et Ydoine* and *Cligès*, the authors are concerned with maintaining the virginity of the female protagonists. Rather than embodying sexuality themselves, the witch-like characters help to maintain the purity of the protagonists by thwarting male sexual plans. Most scholars have analyzed *Cligès* as a version of the Tristan story.[106] Robert Levine argues that de Troyes attempted to moralize the Tristan story by creating a fantasy solution to the problem of a bad marriage. Instead of allowing Fénice to sleep with two men, Levine believes that de Troyes created the potion so that Fénice could remain a virgin. Because he concentrates on the potion, however, Levine overlooks the significance of the witch-like character, Thessala.[107]

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[106] For a discussion of these scholars, see Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris: Hatier, 1968).

[107] Robert Levine, "Repression in Cligès," *SubStance* 5.15 (1976) : 219.

Instead of causing harm or portraying lustful sexual practices, the witches in all of these stories try to promote love. They practice white magic using medicine and herbs and try to help unfortunate women unite with their soulmates. As such, these marvelous witch-like characters are reminiscent Michelet's description of witches in *La Sorcière*. In his text, Michelet describes witches as benevolent healers but admits that these women possessed great knowledge of dangerous plants. He writes "Ce que nous savons le mieux de leur médecine, c'est qu'elles employaient beaucoup, pour les usages, les plus divers, pour calmer, pour stimuler, une grande famille de plantes, équivoques, fort dangereuses, qui rendirent les plus grands service."[108] In *The Enemy Within* (2008), the witchcraft historian John Demos argues that consulting "witches" like those depicted in these narratives was simply part of everyday survival. He contends that throughout the Middle Ages these witches operated with genuine public appreciation, were originally known as "specialists" or "cunning folk," and quite openly used substances to arouse love including herbal potions and powders, pulverized bones, ashes, bathing water, menstrual blood, hair, and human feces.[109] Like Michelet and Demos's accounts of the witch, the

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[108] Michelet 108.

[109] Demos 16.

women in the marvelous literary texts prepare potions using diverse plants and are esteemed for their services. Because they are not evil witches who engage in sexual relationships with the Devil, tempt man to sin, or live to promote wickedness, they are far removed from the definition of the witch that would be established by the *Malleus*.

By the fifteenth century, the representation of the witch in literature was quite different. Rather than present the witch as a supernatural healer who is a kind and compassionate aid to those in distress, authors start to highlight her malevolent side. Martin Le Franc's *Le champion des dames* (1400-42), an allegorical poem that uses dialogue to create a defense of women, is an especially rich literary resource that captures the beginning of the transformation of the witch-like character. As Alan Kors and Edward Peters argue, Le Franc's arguments are significant illustrations of the new constellation of witchcraft beliefs that circulated not only among theologians, lay magistrates, and inquisitiors, but also among literary elite.[110]

In the fourth of the five books that comprise *Le champion des dames*, Le Franc devotes more than one hundred octaves to the discussion of witchcraft and utilizes two literary characters, Franc Vouloir and Lourt Entendement, to stage a debate that questions the very existence of witches.

[110] Kors and Peters 166.

During the course of their debate, Franc Vouloir and Lourt Entendement dispute whether witches can fly, the nature of the Devil, the witch's relationship to Satan, and the particulars of the sabbat. Le Franc's text describes common medieval perceptions of witchcraft, demonstrates the extent to which the medieval society hesitated between differing opinions, and addresses many of the questions that Sprenger and Kramer would discuss forty-five years later in the *Malleus*.

By staging his beliefs about witchcraft in the form of a debate, Le Franc is able to reveal the hesitations circulating in society concerning the veracity of witchcraft. Whether or not witches existed was certainly a topic that Le Franc's contemporaries found confusing. Prior to Le Franc's text, in 906, the Benedictine abbot Regino of Prüm had set the standard for the Catholic faith in the *Canon episcopi* when he denied the existence of witches and stated that "Whoever...believes that anything can be made or that any creature can be changed or transformed in better or to worse or be transformed into another species or likeness, except by the Creator himself who made everything and through whom all things were made, is beyond doubt an infidel."[111] According to de Prüm, witches were a fiction, and

[111] Quoted in Kors and Peters 63.

anyone who believed otherwise was openly in opposition to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Challenges to the Church's stance on witchcraft grew steadily over the centuries, however, and by the publication of the *Malleus*, the Catholic Church had reversed their beliefs on the matter. According to the Church's new stance, witches were real and dangerous beings that threatened mankind and anyone who believed that they did not exist was in danger of losing his salvation.

Since Le Franc composed *Le Champion des dames* after the *Canon* and prior to the *Malleus*, his literary text stands at the intersection of two competing discourses. By constructing his allegorical poem in the form of a debate, Le Franc is able to present both sides of the witchcraft argument, demonstrate society's growing fear of witches and the irresolute state of witchcraft, and avoid any persecution by religious authorities. Moreover, Le Franc distances himself from his literary figures and their opinions in the prologue when he claims that he was simply transcribing a dream that "me monstra les horribles assaulx et la crueuse guerre de Malebouche contre

Amours et les dames."[112] To further excuse the diatribe, he explains "je eus selon mon pouoir et comme leal notaire enregistré la conqueste notable."[113]

Le Franc's description of the witch varies significantly from the representations of witchcraft in marvelous literature. His witches are evil women who fly like birds, steal and eat babies, cause storms that ruin crops, enter houses without using doors, and "mainte aultre male aventure."[114] Because Le Franc presents the arguments in favor of witchcraft under the guise of Lourt Entendement which translates to "Slow Wit" he reveals his bias for Franc Vouloir's or "Free Will's" point of view. The latter hesitates to believe in witches, questions all of Lourt Entendement's beliefs, and maintains that women cannot take to the air.[115] Lourt Entendement, on the other hand, believes in witches and maintains that these malicious women engage in idolatry, hold sabbat meetings, and perform sexual acts with the

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[112] Martin Le Franc, *Le Champion des dames*. Tome IV. (Paris: Honoré Champion Editeur, 1999) 1.

[113] Le Franc 1.

[114]See Le Franc 17300-17527 where Lourt Entendement argues that witches fly like birds (Se volent en l'air comme oysiaux, 17382), steal and eat babies (Que l'enfant ou bers allettié / Sera roty en une haste, / Et puis toutes d'une amistié / Le verront devorer en haste, 17429-32), cause storms that ruin crops (Faisoit sourdre et lever tempeste, 17515), and can enter houses without using doors (Et sont si soubtilles ouvrieres / Qu'elles entrent sans porte ouvrir, 17389-90).

[115] He states "Ja ne croiray tant que je vive / Que femme corporellement / Voit par l'air comme melle ou grive, / Dist le champion prestement. / Sait Augustin dit plainement : / C'est illusion et fantosme ; / Et ne le croyent aultrement / Gregoire, Ambroise ne Jherosme" (17640). The ensuing discussion of whether or not women can take flight is especially interesting because Le Franc's Paris manuscript contains the first illustration in the pictorial history of witchcraft that shows witches flying on broomsticks. For a discussion of this see Kors and Peters 167 and Préaud 49.

Devil.[116] Witches, according to Lourt Entendement, become the "spouses" of the Devil when they pledge their allegiance and their bodies and souls to his service. Because they engage in carnal copulation and because they practice black magic, Le Franc's literary witches are much closer to the descriptions of witches found in the *Malleus* and in all literature written after its publication.

At the end of the discussion of witches in *Le Champion des dames*, Franc Vouloir lambasts religious authorities like Sprenger and Kramer. He argues that if witches are real, it is because religious authorities don't care enough to properly look after certain women. Witches, he explains, are like lost sheep that must be herded back to God. Franc Vouloir claims

> Se la femme fait celle coulpe
>
> Comme tu l'affermes et jures,
>
> Les gens de l'Eglise j'encoulpe,
>
> Contre eulx en viennent les injures.
>
> Que n'ont ilz soings, travaulx et cures

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[116] See Le Franc 17529-36 where Lourt Entendement describes the sabbat meetings "Dis mille vielles en ung fouch / Y avoit il communement, / En fourme de chat ou de bouch / Veans le dyable proprement / Auquel baisoyent franchement / Le cul en signe d'obeissance, / Renians Dieu tout plainement / Et toute sa haulte puissance. / La faisoient choses diverses : / Les unes du dyable aprenoyent / Ars et sorceries perverses / Dont plusieurs maulx elles faisoyent. / Aulx aultres les danses plaisoient / Et aux plusieurs mengier et boire. / La en habondance trouvoient / De tout plus qu'on ne porroit croire" (17469-80). He likens the witch's carnal relationship with the Devil to that of a marriage, claiming that witches are married to the Devil. "Que le dyable home se faisoit / Et avec lui prenoit l'ardeur / De luxure. O Dieu, quel horreur! / Vray Dieu, que la couple et notable ! / O vray Dieu, Jhesus, quel erreur ! / La femme est mariee au dyable ! "

De garder la simplette ouaille

Errans es montaignes obscures

Aprez Sathan qui la fouaille!"[117]

With these words, Le Franc shows concern for the position of women and the way in which religious authorities treat them. A few lines later, he accuses all of the clergy of ignoring the needs of the faithful and focusing on financial concerns and material gain.

The literary representation of witchcraft in *Le Champion des dames* is important because it denotes a pivotal point in the witchcraft debate. Le Franc straddles the fence by presenting both sides of the witchcraft dispute, shows sympathy for those women who are accused of the "heinous crime," and suggests that religious authorities play an important role in witchcraft prevention. Religion, he claims, can thwart witchcraft tendencies. Nonetheless, because he acknowledges the belief in an evil, sexually charged witch, his text marks the beginning of the literary transformation of the witch character. As we will see, after the publication of the *Malleus* at the end of the fifteenth century, authors adopt Lourt Entendement's point of view and are more likely to construct their witch-like characters as evil women who cause harm.

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[117] Le Franc 18033-40.

In *Les Odes* (1550), for example, the French "prince of poets" Pierre de Ronsard (1524 – 1585) paints a terrifying picture of an evil witch in his poem "Contre Denise Sorcière." Ronsard describes his witch

> Tu es la frayeur du village:
> Chacun craignant ton sorcelage
> Te ferme sa maison,
> Tremblant de peur que tu ne taches
> Ses boeufs, ses moutons et ses vaches
> Du just de ta poison.[118]

According to Ronsard, Denise is a wicked witch who uses poison to reap havoc on undeserving victims. In the first stanza of his poem, Ronsard expresses his enmity for the "vieille sorcîere deshontée" and in the remainder of the poem he details her evil deeds. Ronsard's witch causes livestock to die with one look of her sinister eye

> J'ay veu souvent ton oeil senestre,
> Trois fois regardant de loin paistre
> La guide du troupeau,
> L'ensorceler de telle sorte,

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[118] Pierre de Ronsard, "Contre Denise Sorcière," *Oeuvres complètes de Pierre de Ronsard*, ed. Prosper Blanchemain (Paris: P. Jannet, 1857-67) 157.

Que tost apres je la vy morte[119]

she is immodest as she parades through the village exposing parts of her body that should be covered, "Tu monstrois nud le flanc, / Et monstrois nud parmy la rue / L'estomac, et l'espaule"[120] and frequents cemeteries to commune with the dead, "Et par l'horreur des cimetaires / Où tu hantes le plus."[121] Like the marvelous witch, Denise knows the medicinal properties of certain plants, but she uses her knowledge to accomplish her wicked acts.[122] Because Ronsard constructs his literary witch after the publication of the *Malleus*, Denise is unlike the marvelous literary witch who used medical knowledge to promote love. Instead, she conforms to the Dominicans' definition of women and uses plants for evil.

At the end of his poem, Ronsard expresses his hope that the witch dies a defamatory death, that she not be given a proper burial, and that birds and dogs devour what remains of her body. He writes

Dieux ! si là haut pitié demeure,

Pour récompense qu'elle meure,

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[119] Ronsard 157.

[120] Ronsard 157.

[121] Ronsard 157.

[122] Ronsard writes "Nulle herbe, soit elle aux montagnes, /Ou soit venimeuse aux campagnes, / Tes yeux sorciers ne fuit, / Que tu as mille fois coupée / D'une serpe d'airain courbée, / Beant contre la nuit." [Ronsard 158.]

Et ses os diffamez

Privez d'honneur de sépulture,

Soient des oiseaux goulus pasture,

Et des chiens affamez.[123]

Ronsard expresses a violent and frightening desire to destroy the witch and all that remains of her. His image of a witch being brutally and viciously torn apart by hungry animals reveals his intense hatred for the witch. His portrayal of witchcraft and his belief that the witch's actions deserve such a violent and brutal fate contrast sharply with Le Franc's tolerant questioning of her existence.

A mere eight years after Ronsard's denigration of the witch character, Joachim du Bellay (1522-1560) wrote a poem to his friend Remi Doulcin in which he, like Franc Vouloir, questioned the role that the clergy play in witchcraft. In the poem, which forms part of *Les Regrets* (1558), du Bellay reveals that he is horrified by witches. He writes "Quand effroyablement écrier je les ois, / Et quand le blanc des yeux renverser je les vois, / Tout le poil me hérisse, et ne sais plus que dire."[124] Du Bellay is so disturbed by the witches' actions that it causes the hair on his skin to stand up. He explains,

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[123] Ronsard 159.

[124] Joachim Du Bellay, *Les Regrets*, ed. David R. Slavitt (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2004) 208.

however, that his initial terror turns to laughter and condemnation when he witnesses religious authorities who grope the witches' bodies in what he considers gauche attempts at sexual pleasure. He states "Mais quand je vois un moine avecque son Latin / Leur tâter haut et bas le ventre et le tétin / Cette frayeur se passe, et suis contraint de rire."[125] While Du Bellay shows more sympathy for the witches than Ronsard, his poem is not an open critique of witchcraft. He laments the way that these "pauvres filles"[126] are handled but is frightened by their actions and is amused that the monks are able to find pleasure performing exorcisms.

In *Le Tiers Livre* (1546), the French Renaissance doctor and humanist François Rabelais (1494 – 1553) creates a disturbing picture of an unpleasant witch character. Before visiting the witch, his characters Panurge, Epistémon, and Pantagruel discuss the idea of witchcraft. As in Le Franc's poem, the three characters have different perceptions of witchcraft and offer varying opinions. Epistémon is the misogynist of the group. Pantagruel and Panurge defend women and the former even wonders whether witches who are gifted with extraordinary powers should not be considered Biblical prophets.

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[125] Du Bellay 208.

[126] Du Bellay 208.

Panurge wants to visit the witch because he believes that she possesses the power of divination. In accordance with the central theme of *Le Tiers Livre*, Panurge wants to ask her advice on whether or not he should marry. Epistémon agrees to go with Pantagruel and Panurge on this mission, but he is clearly hesitant. He declares that if the witch "...use de sort ou enchantement en ses responses"[127] he will flee immediately.

Rabelais's witch character is "...mal en poinct, mal vestue, mal nourrie, edentée, chassieuse, courbassée, roupieuse, langoureuse..." and is making "...un potaige de choux verds avecques une couane de lard jausne et un vieil savorados."[128] The witch's bizarre behavior during the meeting and her less-than-flattering image disturb the men. As they leave, she lifts her skirt to expose her privates. Rabelais's representation of witchcraft, like the definition established by the *Malleus*, highlights female sexuality. Rather than help the men, the ugly witch character is a sexually charged woman who exhibits suggestive behavior by lifting her dress to expose herself. Because the witch is ugly, the men refuse to see her as a soft and yielding object of desire. Her ugliness makes her apotropaic, and she frightens and turns away the would-be phallic gaze.

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[127]Francois Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1995) 618.

[128]Rabelais 620.

During the sixteenth century, thirty-four years after the publication of Rabelais's *Le Tiers Livre*, France experienced the most deadly period in its witchcraft history. During the 1580s, the Parlement appealed more death sentences than in any decade before or after.[129] This intensification is perhaps what led Michel de Montaigne (1533 – 1592) to address witchcraft in *Les Essais III* (1580). According to Montaigne since no one possesses a "clarté lumineuse et nette," witches should not be condemned to death.[130] Instead, Montaigne contends that God alone should judge those accused of consorting with the antichrist. In his essay *Des Boiteux*, Montaigne suggests that those who accuse others of witchcraft are simply lying and professes his skepticism that so many witches really exist. He states "Combien plus naturel que notre entendement soit emporté de sa place par la volubilité de notre esprit détraqué, que cela, qu'un de nous soit envolé sur un balai, au long du tuyau de sa cheminée, en chair et en os, par un esprit étranger?"[131] Montaigne's interpretation of witchcraft demonstrates an unwillingness to accept the supernatural and a desire to find a rational explanation for the

[129] Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004) 92.

[130] Michel de Montaigne, *Essais III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965) 313.

[131] Montaigne 314.

paranormal. He explains that "il vaut mieux pencher vers le doute que vers l'assurance ès choses de difficile preuve et dangereuse créance."[132]

Despite Montaigne's plea, the sixteenth century began what was to be the most extreme and most violent period in the history of witchcraft, leading witchcraft scholars like Etienne Dennery to write that "[le] XVIe siècle finissant et les quarante premières années du XVIIe siècle fut l'âge d'or de la sorcellerie."[133] During this period in the seventeenth century, Henry Boguet (1550 – 1690) and Pierre de Lancre (1553 – 1631) wrote accounts of their Inquisitions in the Franche-Comté and the French Basque territories, and one of the most famous cases of demonology in France, the possession in Loudun, France occurred in 1634. [134] A year later, the French playwright Pierre Corneille (1606 – 1684) put a witch character on the stage in *Médée* (1635).

Corneille's interest in Medea, Euripides's famous villain who uses supernatural powers to punish her unfaithful husband, may stem from the many instances of witchcraft in seventeenth-century France. Amy Wygant writes that "coming from Normandy, Corneille hailed from the most notable

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[132] Montaigne 314.

[133] Dennery ix.

[134] See Boguet's *Discours des sorciers* (1602) and Pierre de Lancre's *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons* (1612).

center of witchcraft in Western Europe."[135] Like Denise in Ronsard's "Contre Denise Sorcière," Corneille's Medea is a witch who uses supernatural powers and medical knowledge to cause harm. When her husband, Jason, decides to abandon Medea and their two children, Medea vows to avenge his infidelity using supernatural powers. She states that she will "Emprunter le secours d'aucun pouvoir humain."[136] Since she is a witch, Medea does not need the help of human hands. Instead, she turns to her magic powers and medical knowledge; she laces poison on a golden robe and kills her husband's new bride.

Medea, like other witches, is also sexually charged; it is her passion and attraction to Jason that push her to kill her brother, abandon her father, and eventually murder her children. Jean Anouilh's 1946 version of *Médée* emphasizes the protagonist's sexuality and passion for Jason. At the end of the play, Médée exclaims "Désormais, j'ai recouvre mon sceptre, mon frère, mon père et la toison du bélier d'or est rendu à la Colchide: j'ai retrouvé ma patrie et la virginité que tu m'avais ravies!"[137]

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[135] Amy Wygant, *Medea, Magic, and Modernity in France: Stages and Histories, 1553-1797* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007) 100.

[136] Pierre Corneille, *Médée* (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 1978) 1255.

[137] Jean Anouilh, *Médée, Eurydice and Médée*, ed. E. Freeman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1984). 204.

At the end of Corneille's play, Jason laments that he cannot fight against Medea's supernatural forces. He states

> Si l'air est un chemin tousjours libre à ta fuite,
>
> Si tousjours tes dragons sont prest à t'enlever,
>
> Si tousjours tes forfaits ont de quoy me braver ?[138]

Rather than attempt a "vaine poursuitte,"[139] Jason decides to let the gods judge Medea because only they "Peuvent de la sorcière achever le supplice."[140]

What is interesting about Corneille's depiction of Medea is that he refuses to apologize for the witch's actions. Since Corneille believes that there are "...peu de personnages sur la Scene dont les moeurs ne soient plus mauvaises que bonnes,"[141] he never blames Medea for her behavior, and he never declares her guilty. Corneille's depiction of witchcraft is thus unique because it demonstrates sympathy for a female witch character in the grip of a man-made injustice. But because he does not deny the reality of witchcraft, depicts an evil witch, and conforms to the sexual requirements

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[138] Corneille 1626-28.

[139] Corneille 1625.

[140] Corneille 1658.

[141] Corneille 87.

for the definition of the witch, Corneille's seventeenth-century literary witch is still reminiscent of the portrayal of the witch in the *Malleus*.

By the end of the seventeenth century, however, people began to seriously question their beliefs on witchcraft. In 1682, fourty-seven years after Corneille's *Médée*, Louis XIV promulgated an edict that decriminalized witchcraft throughout France. In this edict, the Sun King prescribed only corporal punishment for acts of divination (as opposed to death) and classified the practice of magic as mere superstition.

Louis's XIV's edict helped to bring an end to witch-hunting in France and his proclamations were proof of the changes that were taking place in the mental outlook of educated individuals. The first and most basic of these changes was a growing tendency to question everything, even the basic principles upon which one's world view was based. This tendency can be seen most clearly in the work of René Descartes (1596 – 1650), who in his search for certain knowledge abandoned reliance upon books, rejected the authority of the ancients as well as the scholastics, and built his philosophic system upon doubt. Some scholars point to Descartes's method of doubt and suggest that as it spread throughout Europe, it helped to mount an intellectual revolution that destroyed and dissolved many of the beliefs that lay at the basis of witchcraft prosecutions. They argue that as specific witch

beliefs and the religious and philosophical systems that sustained them became the target of the Cartesian system, the prosecution of witches became increasingly difficult to justify.[142] Other scholars like Brian Levack and Christina Larner suggests that the decline of French witch-hunting was mainly the result of judicial caution and central supervision of the judicial process. Levack suggests that the Parlement de Paris's increased authority helped to end the executions. He contends that when the parlement began to insist on reviewing any death sentences for witchcraft and when it issued many acquittals, the number of cases reaching the parlement steadily declined.[143] Larner also explains that the crime of witchcraft was abolished *de facto* by the repeated refusal of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century courts. She argues that by the end of the eighteenth century, witchcraft executions were no longer sanctioned.[144] As Kors and Peters point out, the seventeenth century was both "the most intensive expression and the virtual death of witchcraft belief and persecution."[145]

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[142] Edward Bever, "Witchcraft Persecutions and the Decline of Magic," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40.2 (2009): 263-93. Trevor Roper, "Witches and Witchcraft," *Encounter* (1967): 30.

[143] Brian Levack, "The Decline and End of Witchcraft Prosecutions," *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 219-35.

[144]Christina Larner, "The Crime of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe," *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldridge (New York: Routledge, 1966) 205-12.

[145] Kors and Peters 21.

Since witchcraft ceased to be a crime after Louis XIV's edict and since enlightened individuals doubted the existence of witches, the fascination with these supernatural women diminished. It is perhaps for this reason that Charles Perrault (1628 – 1703) and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy (1651 – 1705), two French authors who wrote fairy tales at the end of the seventeenth century, utilize evil fairies to accomplish malicious acts. Perrault includes evil fairies in several of his tales in *Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (1697). In Madame d'Aulnoy's *Les Contes de Fées* (1697), six tales have evil fairies and in *Contes Nouveaux ou Les Fées à la mode* (1698), there are three of these malicious supernatural beings.[146] Where well-known fairy tales of German and Russian origin including *Rapuzel*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Snow White*, and *Vasilisa the Fair* employ malevolent witches, the French fairy tales have evil fairies.[147]

The association of the witch and the fairy precedes French fairy tales, however. In *Discours des sorciers*, Henri Boguet associates witches with fairies, writing that fairies like witches are "des vrais diables incorporés qui regnaient il n'y a pas longtemps."[148] Those who questioned Jean d'Arc

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[146] See *Graciosa et Percinet*, *La Princesse Printanière*, *Le Mouton*, *La Grenouille bienfaisante*, *Babiole*, *Le Dauphin*, *Serpentin Vert*, *Le Rameau d'or*, and *Prince Marcassin.*

[147] It is worth noting that the Brothers Grimm and Alexander Afanasyev published these fairy tales in the nineteenth-century.

[148] Boguet 222.

linked witches and fairies, revealing that the two were often seen as equivalents.[149] And Emma Wilby's recent study examines the similarities between the witch and the fairy and suggests that the two did not function as separate phenomena in the early modern mind.[150] Diane Purkiss explains that fairies often appear in witchcraft trials because those who questioned women about witchcraft often questioned women about all supernatural encounters with beings from other planes.[151] Purkiss's recent study, *At the Bottom of the Garden: A History of Fairies, Hobgoblins, and Other Troublesome Things* (2001) provides the most extensive definition of the fairy and allows us to better understand the similarities between the witch and this other supernatural being. She writes that the fairy was often both a child-killing demon and a nymph. She was an outsider who was linked to the dead and had a body that revealed her anomalousness. The fairy was common to peasant culture but was particularized to the local situation. Young men, women in childbirth, and babies and children were most vulnerable to fairies.[152]

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[149] See Préaud where she quotes the *Procès de condemnation de Jeanne Darc*... 21.

[150] Emma Wilby, "The Witch's Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland," *Folklore* 111 (2000): 283-305.

[151] Diane Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden: A History of Fairies, Hobgoblins, and Other Troublesome Things* (New York: New York UP, 2001) 87.

[152] Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden: A History of Fairies, Hobgoblins, and Other Troublesome Things* 48.

Like the witch, the evil fairy often used her supernatural powers to harm children during the period after childbirth referred to as lying-in. Purkiss writes that lying-in lasted for up to a month and was a series of carefully marked stages through which the mother and baby had to pass. It was a period in which the unclean mother and the unnamed baby were considered insecurely anchored to things of this world and was characterized by an intense desire to maintain a closed-off environment for the new mother and child. First, the birthing-room was closed. The mother was confined to her bed and only women could visit. After a period of three days, the mother was allowed to sit up but remained in her room for another week to ten days. In the final stage, the mother could wander around the house, but did not venture outside. During this period of uncertainty, it was common for bewitchment from evil fairies to occur.[153] In Perrault's *La Belle au bois* dormant, for example, seven fairies bless the Princess while one curses the baby by stating that, "...la Princesse se percerait la main d'un fuseau, et qu'elle en mourrait."[154] In *Riquet à la houppe*, the fairy present at the twin girls' births makes one "aussi stupide qu'elle était belle" and

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[153] Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden: A History of Fairies, Hobgoblins, and Other Troublesome Things* 107.

[154] Charles Perrault, *Contes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003) 10.

another "extrêmement laide."[155] In *Prince Marcassin*, the king is suspicious of fairies stating that "la plupart sont malicieuses" and when his child is born as a young boar he blames the deformity on an evil fairy. In *Serpentin Vert*, the witch-like fairy Magotine curses Laidronnette with ugliness. After making the young child "parfaite en laideur" she breaks through a nearby window before completely disappearing.[156] Her nefarious actions and prompt departure into the sky are reminiscent of a witch escaping on her broomstick after accomplishing some malevolent feat and the breaking of the window symbolizes the disrespect and pollution that she brings to what should have been a closed environment.

Perhaps Perrault and Madame d'Aulnoy do not use witches to express the supernatural because French society no longer believed in witchcraft at the end of the seventeenth century when these tales were published. I believe that their tales represent a return to the farfetched world of the marvelous. Like in the marvelous tales of the twelfth century, the fairy tales have marvelous characters, animals, and enchanted objects that accomplish supernatural feats and require that the reader suspend all disbelief and accept

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[155] Perrault 60.

[156] Madame d'Aulnoy, *Contes des fées suivis des contes nouveaux ou les fées à la mode* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004) 576.

the presence of the implausible.[157] In *La Barbe bleue*, the young bride cannot hide the blood that proves that she has disobeyed her husband because "la clef était Fée, et il n'y avait pas moyen de la nettoyer tout à fait."[158] In *Fortunée* a magic cabbage speaks to the protagonist and helps her to find carnations that her brother had stolen, in *Princesse Rosette* the princess floats on a magic bed made of Phoenix feathers, and in *Babiole* an abandoned monkey protagonist finds enchanted oil from an olive that makes her a beautiful princess as well as a charmed hazelnut that transforms into a castle for her to live in.

By the eighteenth century, such unbelievable literary plots fizzled.[159] As the authority accorded to both human reason and science intensified and the Enlightenment's interpretations and analysis of the world challenged religious world views, the very idea of the supernatural came under attack. In L'*Encyclopédie*, a general encyclopedia published between 1751 and 1780 which claimed to desire to change the way people think, the contributors contend that superstitious beliefs and progressive thinking

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[157] For some examples of animals performing supernatural acts see *Le Maître chat ou le Chat botté, L'Oiseau bleu, La bonne petite souris, Le Dauphin, Le Pigeon et la Colombe, Finette Cendron*, and *Serpentin Vert*. For examples of magic objects see *La Barbe bleue, Babiole, Fortunée, Princesse Rosette,* and *Peau d'Âne.*

[158] Perrault 30.

[159] With the exception of Voltaire's *Candide* where his protagonist visits the mythical El Dorado, the canonical works in the eighteenth-century choose real-world settings.

cannot coexist. They brag that "les découvertes le plus belles & les plus utiles vont immortaliser notre siècle;" and state that Europe will never "retomboit dans la barbarie dont elle est enfin sortie."[160]

Witches, when they do exist in the eighteenth century, are most often used in philosophical texts as an example of an antiquated and irrational belief system. The debunking of witchcraft and of all superstitious beliefs was of central concern to Voltaire (1694 – 1778), for example. Twenty-five of the six hundred articles in *Le Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764) deal with magic.[161] And the entries *Athée, Athéisme*, *Catéchisme du curé*, and *Superstition* mention witches specifically.

In *Le Dictionnaire*, Voltaire defines the witch as an enemy of religion and argues that anyone who possessed a secret knowledge was immediately suspected of witchcraft.[162] A year later in *La Philosophie de l'histoire* (1765), he attacks the very belief in magic which he defines as impossible, defines witches as "des milliers de misérables assez insensés pour se croire sorciers" and condemns the "juges assez imbéciles et barbares pour les

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[160] Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie.* (Paris: Briasson, 1751-65) 853.

[161] Roy Porter, "The Enlightenment Crusade," *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 219.

[162] **Voltaire writes that "Autrefois quiconque avait un secret dans un art, courait risque de passer pour un sorcier" (375).**

condamner aux flammes." (210).[163] Voltaire also devotes an entire article in *Prix de la justice et de l'humanité* (1777) to witches. In the article, he blames fanaticism for witchcraft stating "Quand on songe à tous les maux qu'a produits le fanatisme, on rougit d'être homme."[164]

Like Voltaire, the Encyclopédistes, the group of French philosophers who collaborated in the eighteenth century on the *Encyclopédie*, argue that fanaticism promotes superstitious beliefs and that superstitious beliefs lead to witchcraft. In the *Encyclopédie*, they openly define superstition as all religious excess "[t]out excès de la religion" and contend that it is the most terrible "fléau de l'humanité."[165]

The Encyclopédistes differ from Voltaire, however, because they do not deny the possibility of witchcraft. In the articles "possession du demon," "magie," "superstition," "sabbat," and "sorciers," the contributors leave open the possibility of the supernatural. In the article "possession du demon," for example, the contributor admits that diabolical possession is possible if extraordinary events occur. He claims that if the possessed

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[163] Voltaire commences the article by expressing his belief that the very idea of magic is impossible. He states "Qu'est-ce que la magie ? Le secret de faire ce que ne peut faire la nature; c'est la chose impossible" (208).

[164] Voltaire, *Prix de la justice et de l'humanité* 103.

[165] In *L'Encyclopédie* the contributor writes that "La superstition mise en action constitue proprement le fanatisme." [Diderot 670.] They also write that "La superstition est un culte de religion, faux, mal dirigé, plein de vaines terreurs, contraire à la raison & aux saines idées qu'on doit avoir de l'être suprême." [Diderot 659.]

"entende des langues qu'elle n'a jamais apprises; ...parle de matières relevée qu'elle n'a jamais étudiées ; ...s'éleve en l'air sans aucun secours sensible," she is likely possessed. The contributor also quickly states that others act controlled by a supposed supernatural force and mimic possession to advance their own interests.[166]

In these same five articles, the contributors make it clear that they believe that men should examine and weigh the facts before subscribing to any particular belief system.[167] In the article "magie," the contributor defines magic as "une science ténébreuse" that is only "sur trône dans les pays où règnent la barbarie & la grossièreté."[168] And in the article "sorciers," the author reveals his disbelief in witches by suggesting that witches, if they do have magic powers, should be able to use these powers to their own benefit.[169]

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[166] The contributor writes that "d'autres feignoient de l'être pour parvenir à certaines fins." Moreover, he explains that "Une personne peut contrefaire la possédée, & imiter les paroles, les actions & les mouvemens d'un énergumene; les contorsions, les cris, les hurlemens, les convulsions, certains efforts qui paroissent venir du surnaturel, peuvent être l'effet d'une imagination échauffée, ou d'un sang mélancolique, ou de l'artifice..." [Diderot 167.]

[167] In the article "sorciers," the contributor explains the importance of Reason and states that men should "Examiner et peser les faits avant que d'y accorder la confiance, c'est le milieu qu'indique la raison." [Diderot 370.]

[168] Diderot 852.

[169] The contributor writes "On a raison en effet de s'étonner, que des hommes qu'on suppose avoir commerce avec les démons & leur commander, ne soient pas mieux partagés du côté des lumières de l'esprit, & des biens de la fortune, & que le pouvoir qu'ils ont de nuire, ne s'étend jamais jusqu'à leurs accusateurs & à leurs juges." [Diderot 372.]

Ultimately, therefore, the Encyclopédistes present both sides of the witchcraft argument but suggest that enlightened individuals should not believe in witches. They suggest that men should use their "lumières naturelles" and ability to reason to combat illogical belief systems and contend that belief in witches is too uncivilized for educated individuals.[170] Jerome Rosenthal writes that Voltaire's great aim, which could be extended to include all of the Encyclopédistes, was to help humanity become more humane, reasonable, clear-headed, free-minded, tolerant, and peace loving.[171] Their goal was to expose and eliminate the superstitious beliefs that were the products of ignorance and bad logic. The article "magie" of L'*Encyclopédie* sums up their new way of thinking about witchcraft stating that "dans les pays où l'on fait penser, réfléchir, & douter, le démon fait un petit rôle, & la magie diabolique reste sans estime & crédit."[172]

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[170] In L'*Encyclopédie*, the contributors suggest that women are more likely to believe in witches because they are more susceptible to fear and superstition. Like Sprenger and Kramer, these *philosophes* promote a negative image of women. In the article "sabbat," for example, the contributor writes that women and children believe in witchcraft because "Il n'est pas naturellement possible que des imaginations aussi foibles que le sont celles des femmes et des enfans, ne demeurent persuadées" (456). And the article "magie" is also reminiscent of Sprenger and Kramer's argument in the *Malleus*. It suggests that "Il y a toujours eu beaucoup plus de sorcières que de sorciers: nous l'attribuons bonnement à la foiblesse d'esprit ou à la trop grand curiosité des femmes, filles d'Eve, elles veulent se perdre comme elle pour tout savoir" (854). The contributors thus contend that that because women lack the intelligence to properly evaluate superstitious beliefs, reason is the domain of men. They laud scientific progress and intelligence but suggest that men are the only beneficiaries of such "lumières naturelles". Like Sprenger and Kramer, they continue to denigrate women and associate witchcraft with gendered stereotypes.

[171] Jerome Rosenthal, "Voltaire's Philosophy of History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1955): 166.

[172] Diderot 853.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the great European witchhunt was a thing of the past and by the nineteenth century, scholars began a historical and rehabilitating analysis of the witch. In *La Sorcière* (1862), the famous historian Michelet traced the development of the witch and argued that she was a human figure who garnered enmity as a natural rival to religious authorities. According to Michelet, witches were women who used primitive medicine to help their patients. In *La Sorcière*, he suggests that witches were the only doctors available to the majority of the population in the Middle Ages and contends that religious authorities labeled these women as "witches" because they threatened the teachings of the Catholic Church.[173] In particular, Michelet explains that the witch's attempt to relieve human suffering and extend life-expectancy contradicted religious teachings because religious authorities maintained that any bodily suffering was the result of sin and contended that sinners should accept their afflictions as proof of their wrongdoings.[174]

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[173]Michelet writes that "L'unique médecin du people, pendant mille ans, fut la Sorcière. Les empereurs, les rois, les papes, les plus riches barons, avaient quelques docteurs de Salerne, des Maures, des Juifs, mais la masse de tout état, et l'on peut dire le monde, ne consultait que la *Saga* ou *Sage-femme*. Si elle ne guérissait, on l'injuriait, on l'appelait sorcière." [Michelet 33.]

[174] Michelet explains that religious authorities taught that illness was "le péché visible, ou le châtiment de Dieu" (107). He argues that witches were women who attempted to heal without receiving an official medical education and writes that "L'Eglise, qui profondément, de tout son Cœur, haïssait celui-ci...déclare au quatorzième siècle que si la femme ose guérir, sans avoir étudié, elle est sorcière et meurt" (40). Women, of course, did not have the opportunity to receive a medical education. In Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English's *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, they explore the association of witches and medicine and argue that men established the medical field as a male

Aside from Michelet's historical anaysis, witches were surprisingly absent from literary sources in the nineteenth century. The supernatural continued to haunt the literature of this period, but when we find paranormal occurrences, they most often occur in the context of a new literary genre, the fantastic. The fantastic is a mode of fiction in which the possible and the impossible are confounded so as to leave the reader with no satisfying explanation for the strange events which have occurred in the fictional world. It is a genre that hesitates between a natural, empirical, scientific explanation and a supernatural, inexplicable, transcendent one. In *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, Todorov argues that the fantastic represents the duration of the uncertainty that results when the reader "hesitates" between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described.

Guy de Maupassant's *Le Horla* (1866) is an excellent example of this literary genre. The plot of the short story centers around the narrator's belief that he is being haunted by an invisible being which he names Le Horla. As the story progresses, Maupassant's narrator questions whether there might be an alternate and undetectable universe that exists alongside everyday

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domain. They argue that university-trained physicians claimed control over women's bodies and destroyed the power of wise women who offered medical aid by declaring them witches. [Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (Brooklyn: The Faculty Press, 1973)]

reality. But he hesitates to believe in demonic antireality. In a conversation with a monk at the Mont Saint-Michel, the narrator even states "S'il existait sur la terre d'autres êtres que nous, comment ne les connaîtrions-nous point depuis longtemps; comment ne les auriez-vous pas vus, vous ? Comment ne les aurais-je pas vus, moi ?"[175] How, the narrator wonders, could an enlightened individual like himself not be aware of supernatural beings?

The narrator begins the story confident of his intellectual acuity, but each night when he lies down to sleep, he is gripped by an unexplainable terror. He questions whether there might be something or someone who is purposely haunting his bedroom. He cannot understand why he is so uneasy in his own bed and his own confusion and fear spreads to the reader. Is there really a presence haunting the narrator? Or is he simply mad?

The haunting of the narrator or the narrator's madness intensifies as the story progresses and eventually the narrator surmises that there must be an invisible presence that controls his waking actions and comes to disturb his sleep at night. But almost as soon as we are ready to admit the existence of this "être invisible" that is tormenting the narrator, he convinces himself and us that the presence is simply the "jouet de [s]on imagination énervée"

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[175]Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla," *Le Horla et autres contes cruels et fantastiques*, (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1976) 417.

and decides that it is his own solitude that breeds his belief in the supernatural.[176]

The narrator cannot come to terms with his feelings and cannot understand what is happening in his life. What he describes seems to be supernatural occurrences, but he cannot simply dismiss them as supernatural phenomena. As readers participating in the narrator's hesitation, we ask ourselves whether the dark otherness that he continually describes is truly external or whether it is self-generated. Even at the end of the short story, we never know whether this strange malignant creature really exists or whether the narrator is a victim of his own fears and delusions. We hesitate to believe, are as horrified as the narrator, and share in his descent into madness.[177]

Before concluding this chapter, it is worth mentioning another literary movement and one final witch-like figure. In *Nadja* (1928), the surrealist author André Breton (1896 – 1966) creates a witch-like female protagonist. Surrealism, the cultural movement that began in the 1920's and influenced literature, art, and music, was an attempt to unlock the hidden powers of the imagination, go beyond rational thought, and search the obscured depths of

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[176] Maupassant 430.

[177] Todorov defines our hesitation as "l'effet fantastique" and suggests that when "Il y a un phénomène étrange qu'on peut expliquer de deux manières, par des types de causes naturelles et surnaturelles…la possibilité d'hésiter entre les deux crée l'effet fantastique" (30).

the mind. Surrealist authors, of which Breton was the leader, believed in an alternate reality and were influenced by Freud's discovery that a part of the human mind escapes consciousness. They wanted to find a language and a method that was capable of expressing the hidden and unexpressed. Through hypnosis, drugs, dream analysis, and automatic writing, they hoped to uncover what Breton defined in *Manifestes du Surréalisme* (1924) as "...le fonctionnement réel de la pensée...en l'absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison."[178] They wanted to uncover how the mind truly operated, and they wanted to expose the hidden reality that they believed existed in a latent form alongside the visible.

Since the witch figure is supposedly the link between the real world and a demonic antireality, since she can exist in the real world in spite of her supernatural qualities, and since she manages to have qualities and powers that defy rational explanations, the discovery of a real witch would be a surrealist dream-come-true. An ideal surrealist witch could not be comprehended by the rational, scientific, and finite mind. Instead, she would stand beyond reason, challenge reality, and be proof of the existence of absolute mystery.

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[178] André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962) 36.

In *Nadja*, Breton describes Nadja as the physical embodiment of the surrealist ideas, and he imbues her with witch-like qualities. Since Nadja openly rejects the tyranny of rational thought and refuses to conform to the dominant ideology of Parisian society, Breton believes that she is an incarnation of surrealism. And his descriptions of her reveal that she has a magical appeal that is both haunting and magnetic. He writes that she is "...libre de tout lien terrestre"[179] and "...qu'elle se pose à peine en marchant."[180] Furthermore, he comments on her independence and chimerical qualities "J'ai pris, du premier au dernier jour, Nadja pour un génie libre, quelque chose comme un de ces esprits de l'air que certaines pratiques de magie permettent momentanément de s'attacher, mais qu'il ne saurait être question de se soumettre."[181] It is precisely these qualities that Breton admires in Nadja. Perhaps he even wants Nadja to be more of a witch than she really is. When Breton and Nadja are dining together, he is fascinated and pleased that the waiter breaks eleven plates, and he attributes the broken tableware to her "...pouvoir sur certains homes."[182]

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[179] André Breton, *Nadja* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928) 119.

[180] Breton, *Nadja* 78.

[181] Breton, *Nadja* 148.

[182] Breton, *Nadja* 132.

Nadja possesses a magnetic appeal that haunts Breton and all of those who interact with her. She also seems to have magical powers since she floats through the air free of all restraints. But the only overt mention of witchcraft in the novel lies in Nadja's own recount of a woman who looked like a witch who came to visit her. After she tells him the story, Breton says that Nadja "...se donne avec une étonnante facilité, les airs du Diable, tel qu'il apparait dans les gravures romantiques."[183] Nadja, he contends, looks like a witch.

Breton admires and is fascinated by Nadja's witch-like qualities, but he also sets up expectations that she cannot fulfill. It is perhaps Breton's disappointment that leads him to abandon Nadja and declare "Toi qui, pour tous ceux qui m'écoutent, ne dois pas être une entité mais une femme, toi qui n'es rien tant qu'une femme, malgré tout ce qui m'en a imposé et m'en impose en toi pour que tu sois une Chimère."[184] Breton realizes that Nadja is a real, human woman. Nothing, he says, but a woman. Through these words, Breton suggests that Nadja failed him because she was not a real supernatural being.

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[183] Breton, *Nadja* 137.

[184] Breton, *Nadja* 209.

At the end of the portion of the novel that concentrates on Nadja, authorities decide that the protagonist does not behave normally, declare her mad and force her into an insane asylum. The correlation between witch-like characters and madness is not surprising given the way that society began to interpret witchcraft in the twentieth century. With the advent of psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychiatry, doctors began to question whether witches were perhaps victims of mental illnesses.[185]

While Hébert, Sartre, Vassalli, and Condé do not create witch characters that are insane, they do suggest that their characters, like Nadja, exist on the margins of society and challenge the dominant belief systems. As I have already demonstrated in chapter one, the twentieth-century authors construct their witch characters so that they conform to the definition of the witch as described by the *Malleus*. Like every text written after the *Malleus* and like the majority of the literary witches explored in this chapter, Hébert, Sartre, Vassalli, and Condé's witches are victims of Sprenger and Kramer's description.

Tracing the witch in literature allows us to realize the extent of the witch's evolution as well as the reflective role that literary sources can play. The witch's transformation from a good-natured and caring healer to an ugly

[185] I will explore the link between hysteria and witchcraft in detail in chapter four.

and sexually charged fiend is a dramatic alteration that has lasting consequences. The representation of the witch as an evil figure reflects what and how people thought about witches. Just how culpable literature is for propagating the witch's new definition is uncertain. What is certain, however, is that the witch evolved dramatically after the publication and dissemination of the *Malleus* and that this new depiction gained a greater audience by circulting in literary sources than it would have if it had stayed among theologians and inquisitors.

Chapter 3
Rehabilitating the Witch Character

The Witch as Victim in Hébert, Sartre, Vassalli, and Condé

A son apparition, la Sorcière n'a ni père, ni mère, ni fils, ni époux, ni famille. C'est un monstre, un aérolithe, venu on ne sait d'où.[186]

-Jules Michelet

In the above, Michelet compares the Medieval witch with a meteorite. He claims that people viewed the witch as a Medieval "monster" who was especially frightening because she had no family, came from nowhere, and had no history. Like a meteor for those who lived in the Middle Ages, she emerged in the dark sky to reap havoc on the Earth.

If we were to extend this comparison, we might argue that the witch causes no harm when she remains in her prescribed domain. As a meteoroid existing in outer space, she cannot harm our understandings of the way in which the world operates. As she enters the Earth's atmosphere, however, the witch, like a meteor, becomes a fireball that emits light and disturbs material knowledge.

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[186] Michelet 36.

By the twentieth century, representations of witches in literary texts are quite different. Rather than present witch characters that emerge from the unknown, the witches that we find in Hébert, Sartre, Vassalli, and Condé are grounded in reality. The twentieth-century authors construct witch characters that live real lives, participate in mundane tasks and chores, and are part of families and communities that influence their developments. Unlike Michelet's witch who had "ni père, ni mère, ni fils, ni époux, ni famille," the twentieth century authors create characters that are significantly affected by their interactions with their families and with other individuals. In fact, Hébert, Sartre, Vassalli, and Condé construct witches who demonstrate the extent to which our identities are influenced by the nature of our relations to others. Through their stories, they rehabilitate the witch by demonstrating that the "witch" was really just a victim of her particular situation.

With their narratives of witchcraft, Hébert, Condé, Vassalli, and Sartre also engage in a project of demythification and historical revision. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, they show how the "witch" was an embodiment of the *Other*, as well as a condemnation of sexuality and difference in women. By utilizing their narratives to challenge prevailing cultural attitudes and revise dominant beliefs about women labeled as

witches, Hébert, Condé, Vassalli, and Sartre participate in a feminist revision of the witch. In *Contre-Voix: Essais de Critique au Féminin*, Lori Saint-Martin suggests that such revisions are integral goals of modern feminism. She contends that

> L'une des démarches essentielles du féminisme moderne a été, on le sait, la recherche de symboles et de valeurs propres aux femmes, démarche qui englobe la revalorisation de figures féminines millénaires mais dépréciées : Eve, par exemple, qui, de femme faible séduite par le diable, devient dans la pensée féministe une rebelle et une jouisseuse. Dans ce contexte, la relecture du personnage de la sorcière a un caractère exemplaire: des écrivaines, collectivement, renversent la tradition et célèbrent les traits associés aux femmes et dévalorisés par la culture masculine.[187]

According to Saint-Martin, the witch occupies a central place in the feminist mythology as a being that struggles against repressive powers. Rather than denigrate the witch character, she suggests that modern feminist texts seek to reverse previous traditions by celebrating witches as symbols of freedom and contestation. Another scholar, Marie Josephine Diamond, echoes Saint-

[187] Saint-Martin, *Contre-Voix : Essais de critique au féminin* 166

Martin's arguments and contends that such feminist revisions of literary history have transformed the textual inscriptions of gender and paved the way for the emergence of a new genre of women writing. She suggests that "demonized madwomen" like the witch have been liberated from their enforced exile, given a new voice, and been allowed to speak and "remember history" differently.[188] Justine Sempruch acknowledges the need to rehistoricize and revitalize the witch and contends that the witch figure is a crucial metaphor for *herstory*, the feminist mythology constituted as an alternative to the established male-centered master narrative.[189] And Marie Denise Shelton believes that giving voice to the witch allows authors to uncover the complex interplay between subjectivity, the collective, and history. She contends that the witch is both a political and poetic figure who "initiates the liberating process through which the feminine can be reconfigured."[190] These examples demonstrate the extraordinary flexibility of the term "witch" as a signifier within all feminist discourse. As I will demonstrate, Hébert, Condé, Vassalli, and Sartre utilize their narratives to

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[188] Marie Josephine Diamond, "Remembering Differently: The Madwoman, the Hysteric, and the Witch in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Hélène Cixous' *Portrait de Dora* and Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière...noire de Salem, Gendered Memories*," ed. John Neubauer and Helga Geyer-Ryan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) 9-10.

[189] Sempruch 54.

[190] Marie Denise Shelton Shelton, Marie Denise. "Condé: The Politics of Gender and Identity." *World Literature Today* 67.4 (1993): 720.

allow the witch to speak, to demonstrate the cultural construction of the "witch" identity, and to show how the witch's meaning changes according to different contexts. They thus help to rewrite the history of witchcraft and the history of women by deconstructing the witch.

One of the primary methods by which Condé, Hébert, and Vassalli achieve this goal is by demonstrating that their "witches" are victims of circulating rumors that attempt to establish and fix their identities. Each novel commences with detailed information that focuses on the familial situations of the witches and shows how they are victims of their families' histories. Through this background information, Condé, Hébert, and Vassalli suggest that their witches are unjustly implicated in myths and stories that surround their genealogies. On the opening page of Condé's novel, for example, we learn that Tituba is the fruit of rape. In fact, in the opening sentence of the novel, Tituba explains "Abena, ma mère, un marin anglais la viola sur le pont du Christ the King… C'est de cette agression que je suis née. De cet acte de haine et de mépris."[191] Condé's decision to begin her novel with this potent character description reveals the importance that she places on the traumatic event and on the role that it played in Tituba's life. It is a precise description, revealing that Abena was aggressively

[191] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 13.

abused by an English (white) sailor. Isabel Carrera Suárez believes that Condé begins her novel with this information to remind us that Tituba is mulatto and to demonstrate that Tituba's body is a testament to the violence exacerbated on innocent women by colonizers.[192] According to Suárez, Tituba is a victim whose very physicality is a reminder of the brutality, rape, and humiliation experienced by Abena.[193]

Recently, Tituba's racial identity has been the subject of animated debate both in historical research and in the analysis of her literary manifestations. Chadwick Hansen, for example, expresses profound dismay at the diverse versions of the character and deplores the alterations of her race. He asks that the reader remember that Tituba was a Carib Indian woman and not of African descent.[194] Dawn Fulton argues that Condé transforms History by suggesting that Tituba is black. She points out that Tituba was most likely Amerindian and suggests that Condé altered History

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[192] Isabel Carrera Suárez, "The Americas Postcoloniality and Gender: New World Witches in Maryse Condé and Lucia Guerra," *Post/Imperial Encounters: Anglo-Hispanic Cultural Relations*, ed. Tazon Salces and Isabel Carrera Suárez (New York: Rodopi, 2005) 140.

[193] In the opening chapter of the novel, Condé reveals that Abena resented her daughter because she viewed her as a constant reminder of the pain and humiliation of her time with the white colonizer who so violently possessed her. Tituba laments "Quand découvris-je que ma mère ne m'aimait plus? Peut-être quand j'atteignis cinq ou six ans. ...je ne cessais plus de lui remettre en l'esprit le Blanc qui l'avait possédée sur le pont du Christ the King... Je lui rappelais à tout instant sa douleur et son humiliation." Through these words, Condé reveals that Tituba's very presence is a source of anguish for Abena. [Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 18.]

[194] Chadwick Hansen, "The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or Why American Intellectuals Can't Tell and Indian Witch from a Negro." *New England Quarterly* 47 (1974): 3-12.

for the twentieth-century U.S. audience who would find a black woman more "useful" as a ready incarnation of a denigrated people. By making Tituba African, Fulton suggests that she is more accessible as a condemnation of contemporary racism.[195]

Regardless of her "true" racial identity, I believe that Condé focuses on the race of the colonizer to remind us that Tituba is biracial. She emphasizes Tituba's mixed origins to highlight how the protagonist, at her birth, already does not fit entirely into either racial community. As J.A. Brown-Rose points out, Tituba is a product of the volatile contact between two very different cultures. She is a hybrid like the Caribbean, created by contact between the enslaved and the slave owner.[196]

Condé's description of Tituba's multi-racial past is important because it allows the reader to understand how Tituba comes to be known as a witch. The opening sentence referring to Abena's rape and Tituba's biracialism is only the beginning of the detailed description that Condé provides of Tituba's background. In the first chapter, she includes a concise history of Tituba's early years that provides a contextual explanation of Tituba's familial situation. She demonstrates that Tituba's relationship with her

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[195] Dawn Fulton, *Signs of Dissent: Maryse Condé and Postcolonial Criticism* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia Press, 2008) 46.

[196] J.A. Brown-Rose, *Critical Nostalgia and Caribbean Migration* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009) 61.

mother and her associations with Man Yaya form an identity for Tituba that permeates society and affects how others view her. At one point, Tituba laments

> A ma vue, tout ce monde sauta prestement dans l'herbe et s'agenouilla tandis qu'une demi-douzaine de paires d'yeux respectueuses et terrifiées se levaient vers moi. Je restai abasourdie. Quelles légendes s'étaient tissées autour de moi ? On semblait me craindre. Pourquoi ? Fille d'une pendue, recluse au bord d'une mare, n'aurait-on pas dû plutôt me plaindre?[197]

Feared and despised for her powers, Tituba criticizes her reception in the community that she wants to serve. She regrets and is confused by the "legends" that surround her upbringing but notes that they influence everyone from Susanna Endicott, her white educated master who demands "N'es-tu pas la fille de cette Abena qui avait tué un planteur?"[198] to the slaves who try to hide when she passes them on the road. Condé thus focuses on Tituba's familial history and her biraciality to demonstrate that her witch protagonist is immediately excluded from both the white and black

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[197] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 25-6.

[198] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 47.

communities. She is the victim of her family's past and of her upbringing with Man Yaya.

Because Condé examines the formation of identity in terms of chains of relations, she suggests that Tituba's individual history is linked to her genealogy. In an interview with Françoise Pfaff, Condé explained this choice stating that she chose to highlight the importance of her protagonist's familial relationships because she believes in the preeminence of the family nucleus and of the constant need to define oneself within the terms of that nucleus. She argued that "...the family remains the essential element in our societies and social fabric. Whatever you do, you are still someone's daughter; you are always defined by a particular genealogy..."[199] Through these words, Condé reveals her belief that identity is inextricably connected to family. Her credence in the importance of family helps to explain why she chooses to construct her witch character as she does.

In Hébert's novel, like in Condé's, she begins with a character description of *soeur* Julie that reveals that the witch protagonist is the product of a traumatic family situation and childhood that includes rape and child abuse. She reveals that *soeur* Julie's mother and father are practicing

[199] Francoise Pfaff, *Conversations with Maryse Condé* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) 243.

witches and that they force their daughter to join in their vocation. Hébert thus suggests that being a witch is part of *soeur* Julie's lineage.

Like Condé, Hébert stresses the importance of her witch protagonist's genealogy several times in the novel. In one instance, her protagonist explains

> Je leur fais peur parce que j'ai les yeux jaunes comme ma mère et comme ma grand-mère. Toute une lignée de femmes aux yeux vipérins, venues des vieux pays, débarquées, il y a trois cents ans, avec leurs pouvoirs et leurs sorts en guise de bagages, s'accouplant avec le diable, de génération en génération....[200]

Soeur Julie is terrifying, she claims, because she is the product of her family tree and of a long line of witches that determine and define her. Later in the novel, Hébert reinforces the importance of *soeur* Julie's familial relations by comparing the witch's genealogy to that of a Russian Matryoshka doll.[201] She writes that the chaplain Léo-Z. Flageole witnesses a presentation of *soeur* Julie's family tree when he has women who are "...vide et creuse...faite exprès pour contenir une autre femme plus petite, plus

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[200] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 92.

[201] Matryoshka dolls are wooden dolls which separate from top to bottom to reveal another doll of the same sort inside, which has another doll inside of it, and so on.

ancienne dans le temps"[202] parade before him. Like Matryoshka dolls, each woman in *soeur* Julie's family has another hidden inside of her. The final woman in the parade, Barbe Hallé, was a real woman, born in 1645 in France. Believed to be possessed by the Devil, Hallé was one of the first women associated with witchcraft in Québec.[203] Because of *soeur* Julie's association with all of these women, we realize that like one of these babushka dolls, *soeur* Julie only exists entirely when she is with all of the other dolls. The other dolls form part of who and what *soeur* Julie is; without the other witches, *soeur* Julie would be a simple, hollow shell.

Several scholars have written that sœur Julie is a victim of witchcraft. In his article "Les Enfants du sabbat et la problématique de la libération chez Anne Hébert," Neil Bishop argues that Hébert creates an unfortunate situation for her witch protagonist. He suggests that sœur Julie suffers from a "prédestination de type janséniste" and contends that when she becomes a witch sœur Julie witnesses "l'élimination de [sa] personnalité individuelle" because she is "...affublée d'une vocation choisie *pour* elle et non *par* elle."[204] Mair Verthuy also suggests that sœur Julie loses her individual

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[202] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 103.

[203] Robert-Lionel Séguin, *La Sorcellerie au Québec du XVIII au XIX siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1968).

[204] Neil Bishop, "Les Enfants du sabbat et la problématique de la libération chez Anne Hébert," *Etudes Canadiennes* 6.8 (1980) 34.

identity and freedom when she becomes a witch. In her article "Ni verbe ni chair/e?: la religieuse et la clôture chez Michele Mailhot et Anne Hébert," she compares the witch with Eve and contends that in each case, the woman (Eve/witch) obeys a man (Adam/Adélard) who obeys a supernatural being (God/Devil).[205] Both Bishop and Verthuy believe that *soeur* Julie is a victim of her witch family and of male domination.

Other scholars maintain that Hébert's witch represents the feminine subversion of dominating masculine structures. Stanley Pean writes that *soeur* Julie rejects the "image de la femme à laquelle le pouvoir voudrait la confier" and believes that she "fait éclater les images reçues de la femme."[206] Elise Salaun writes that

> Dans le couvent, sœur Julie possède la véritable force, quelle soit physique ou psychologique. Munie de cette force, elle investit les domaines où s'exerce traditionnellement l'autorité masculine, c'est-à-dire la religion (abbé Migneault), la science (docteur Painchaud), la justice (abbé Flageole et le grand exorciste) et l'économie (sœur économe) pour l'invalider de l'intérieur. Autant dans les affaires spirituelles, humaines que

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[205] Mair Verthuy, "Ni verbe ni chair/e?: la religieuse et la clôture chez Michele Mailhot et Anne Hébert," *Atlantis* 14.1(1988) 31.

[206] Stanley Pean, "Anne Hébert, la transgression," *Solaris* 94.4 (1990) 30.

> matérielles, le genre masculin, soumis à une force féminine supérieure, est livré aux attaques…[207]

For both of these scholars, Hébert's witch is a rebel who creates her own identity by challenging and undermining traditionally male-dominated spheres. Saint-Martin notes that Hébert " rompt avec une vision patriarcale de la femme comme victime passive, mais aussi avec celle, chère à certaines féministes, d'un pacifisme féminin inné…"[208] She views sœur Julie as a strong, feminist insurgent and argues that her character contests the traditional definition of woman. And Elodie Rousselot believes that *Les Enfants du sabbat* is a novel that celebrates female individuality and otherness. She writes that while "Julie needs to accept the marginal nature of her origins in order to be liberated from the tyranny of a normalising social structure…we see her making her own choices and embracing her status of witch as the one in which she is best able to express and fulfill herself."[209] For these scholars, *soeur* Julie's witchhood is not a liability; it is

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[207] Elise Salaun "Joseph et Julie, jumeaux androgynes. Indifférenciation de genre dans *Les Enfants du sabbat*," *Cahiers Anne Hébert* 8 (2008) 77.

[208] Lori Saint-Martin, "Femmes et hommes, victimes ou bourreaux? Violence, sexe, et genre dans l'œuvre d'Anne Hébert," *Féminin/masculin dans l'œuvre d'Anne Hébert*, (Editions Fides: Université de Sherbrooke, 2008) 128-9.

[209] Elodie Rousselot, "'Otherness and the Quest for a Sense of Identity in Anne Hébert's Les Enfants du sabbat and Le Premier jardin," *Identity and Alterity in Canadian Literature*, ed. Ana Olos and Dana Puiu (Baia Mare: North University Baia Mare Press, 2003) 233.

the choice of a marginal being that refuses to succumb to traditional expectations and male domination.

The interpretation of *soeur* Julie as a rebellious, defiant character coincides with Hébert's vision of the witch. As she stated in an interview with André Vanasse, witches were women who had to "steal" control from the patriarchal societies in which they lived. Witchcraft, according to Hébert "[est] un pouvoir noir, c'est un pouvoir en dehors de la société telle qu'elle a été construite..."[210] In the interview Hébert suggests that witchcraft was a means for women to gain access to power and to redefine themselves.[211] Moreover, it was an opportunity for them to assert their independence. In another interview with Gloria Escomel Hébert states that "En les montrant autrement que comme de petits êtres fragiles, j'exprime ma conception de la femme, je fais en quelque sorte un acte de foi en elle..."[212] Unlike Bishop and Verthuy's interpretations of sœur Julie, Hébert reveals that she meant for her protagonist to be a positive, powerful, and dynamic female force.

What Hébert does suggest with her novel is that *soeur* Julie is the victim of her society's established traditions and of the way in which the

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[210] Anne Hébert, "L'écriture et l'ambivalence: entrevue avec Anne Hébert," interview with André Vanasse, *Voix et Images* 3 (1982) 446.

[211] Anne Hébert, "L'écriture et l'ambivalence" 445-6.

[212] Anne Hébert, "Anne Hébert: 30 ans d'écriture," interview with Gloria Escomel, *Madame au Foyer*, Sept. 1980, 10.

society determines and defines female behavior. She highlights *soeur* Julie's familial relations and her experiences as a child in order to paint a picture of the expectations that *soeur* Julie must confront in her quest to define her own identity. In *Anne Hébert In Search of the First Garden*, Kelton Knight argues that Hébert's fiction focuses on the importance of memory and of childhood experiences because she wants to represent the "elaborate dance of confrontation and retreat...between a present self and an older one."[213] He contends that Hébert's characters experience "both a deconstruction of the present self and a reconstruction of a new identity"[214] that ultimately reveals the importance that origins play in stabilizing that new self-identity. As I will demonstrate in chapter four, when *soeur* Julie uncovers repressed facets of her personality through her analysis of childhood memories, she realizes that her witch lineage is a defining and indelible characteristic of her identity. Like Knight suggests, *soeur* Julie's origins are important and the recollection of memories and past experiences are crucial to the character's understanding of her present self-identity. Nevertheless, I believe that *Les Enfants du sabbat* is a unique and complex text that does not allow, like Knight suggests, for the reconstruction of a new identity. In chapter four I

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[213] Kelton Knight, *Anne Hébert: In Search of the First Garden* (New York: P. Lang, 1998) 2.

[214] Knight 2.

will argue that *soeur* Julie never forms a stable identity. Instead, I suggest that the protagonist learns to understand her own conflictual duality.[215] Although the protagonist must come to terms with her past and although origins certainly play an important part of *soeur* Julie's self exploration, Hébert demonstrates that *soeur* Julie's witchhood is just one component of her identity. It is, however, her witchhood that allows *soeur* Julie to stand outside of traditional boundaries, to critique the hypocrisy of her surroundings, and to defy the patriarchal structures that seek to dominate and determine her identity.

Vassalli also commences his novel with detailed information about his protagonist's background. We learn that Antonia is an orphan who was abandoned at the entrance to the House of Charity of San Michele and has no knowledge of her family. Vassalli explains that the nuns who assume Antonia's care can only speculate on her origins and reveals that they immediately form a negative image of her because "il colore nero dei suoi occhi e la pelle scura avevano fatto pensare ad una diretta discendenza da qualcuno dei non pochi ufficiali e soldati spagnoli."[216] The members of Antonia's society immediately decide that her hair color is indicative of her

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[215] I believe that soeur Julie's identity vacillates between witch and hysteric and that she occupies many different identities throughout the novel. I will explore this idea in more detail in chapter three.

[216] Vassalli, *La Chimera* 14.

unknown mother's licentious affair with a Spanish soldier and these invented theories provide ample fodder for imaginative minds who label the orphan as an outsider and a witch. Ruth Glynn writes that Antonia "...had been conceived outside the law of both Church and State, reared in a world apart, the closed world of the convent, and then [became] an outsider in the village."[217] She contends that Antonia's bastard birth, life in the convent, and supposed Spanish lineage caused the townspeople to deem Antonia a threatening influence to the small-town community of Zardino. Vassalli writes that the inhabitants of Zardino judged Antonia by her geneology, labeled the protagonist as "una figlia del peccato più sozzo che ci sia, il peccato carnale,"[218] and as "una figlia del Diavolo! Una piccola stria!"[219] In other words, Vassalli overtly argues that Antonia becomes a witch because the society in which she lives labels her as such after they judge her familial history and her rearing as foreign.

Condé, Hébert, and Vassalli thus choose to highlight defining characteristics of their witches in the opening pages of their novels so that they may demonstrate how their protagonists come to be known as witches.

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[217] Ruth Glynn, *Contesting the Monument: The Anti-Illusionist Italian Historical Novel* (Leeds, Northern Univesities Press, 2005) 91.

[218] Vassalli, *La Chimera* 255.

[219] Vassalli, *La Chimera* 66.

Their witches are victims of their own families, of the societies in which they live, of rumors circulating in society, and of presumptions that people make concerning their origins. As such, the twentieth-century "witches" are really simply individuals who are prey to circumstances that stand beyond their control. They cannot escape the past and are not free from preconceived stereotypes that surround their lineages.

In *Les Sorcières de Salem*, Sartre reveals nothing about the familial origins of his witch characters. Unlike Hébert, Condé, and Vassalli, Sartre provides very little background information and memories (both societal and personal) matter little in the identity construction of his witch characters. Instead of relying on the past, Sartre's witches have identities that are a reflection of their present relationships. In order to learn about his witches, we must glean character descriptions from Sartre's stage directions and from the way in which his characters interact with one another. This is perhaps best illustrated by considering Sartre's three main witches: Elisabeth, John, and Abigail.

If we examine the first few pages of Sartre's scenario, we realize that he does reveal distinctive character traits for each witch in their initial appearance. Elisabeth appears for the first time in a scene with Fancy. Fancy is playing with a doll, and Elisabeth reproaches her "C'est le jour du

Seigneur, Fancy: les grandes personnes ne travaillent pas et les enfants ne doivent pas jouer."[220] This simple interaction between mother and daughter reveals the crux of Elisabeth's character; she is highly religious and takes the Puritan religious beliefs seriously. Sartre's stage directions intensify the description, noting that Elisabeth has an "air de douceur impitoyable" and that "Elisabeth demeure raide et domine Fancy de toute sa hauteur."[221] Elisabeth stands over Fancy as a dominating and threatening presence.

Because she does not want her daughter to play, Elisabeth snatches the doll from her daughter's hands. When Fancy begins desperately crying for it, her father, John "entre en courant, se baisse, enlève Fancy dans ses bras et la serre contre lui."[222] John responds to his daughter's tears by creating a compromise; Fancy cannot play with the doll, but she can look at her while she prays.[223] If we compare John and his actions to Elisabeth, we conclude that religious principles hold less influence in his life. His response suggests a desire to create a new value system.

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[220] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 2.

[221] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 1.

[222] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 2.

[223] John tells Fancy "Voilà ce qu'on va faire: ta maman va la sortir du paquet et la poser sur la commode. Toi, tu vas t'asseoir là (il désigne une petite chaise de bois) et dire tes prières jusqu'à ce qu'on t'emmène au temple…Mais tu pourras la regarder." [Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 3.]

John and Elisabeth's interaction after the confrontation between mother and daughter reinforces Elisabeth's domineering nature and demonstrates the way in which John and Elisabeth relate to one another as a married couple. When John tells his wife "Fancy a peur de vous. Je n'aime pas cela," Elisabeth once again resorts to religion arguing "Mon pauvre John, je ne suis qu'une pécheresse comme toutes les créatures."[224] And after John reveals that Elisabeth scares him as well, Sartre writes "Elisabeth a un sourire douloureux et ingrat. Elle fait un mouvement vers lui, ses bras se soulèvent très légèrement comme si elle allait les lui tendre. Puis le sourire disparait, les bras retombent, elle se détourne, ouvre la porte de sa chambre et disparait."[225] Here and throughout the scenario, Sartre demonstrates that Elisabeth suffers from the internal turmoil that results when she tries to reconcile her own desires with the Puritan ethic. As Elisabeth moves towards her husband and holds out her arms, she attempts to reconcile her own longings with what she has been taught by the austere Puritan system of moral standards and principles. Because John has his back to his wife in the scene, he remains oblivious to his wife's actions. As readers, we realize her frustration. Her body captures the feelings of exasperation that she does not verbalize.

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[224] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 4.

Aside from these telling interactions between John and Elisabeth, we know nothing of the witch characters' pasts. Sartre does not comment on the history of their marriage or on their familial upbringings. Unlike Tituba, *soeur* Julie, and Antonia, Sartre's characters are not victims of their genealogies.

While Sartre does not delve into his third witch's past in an attempt to understand her present behavior, he does provide more background information for Abigail. When Mary Warren angers in a conversation with John she states "Je n'ai pas la garde d'Abigail, Maître Proctor. Abigail n'est pas une servante comme les autres! C'est la nièce de notre Pasteur qui l'a placée chez vous pour qu'elle apprenne le gouvernement d'une maison."[226] This information is certainly more than is provided for the other two witches. Sartre also offers a more detailed physical description of Abigail in his stage directions. He describes her as "une fille fraiche et désirable d'une vingtaine d'années."[227] Sartre's precision concerning Abigail's description reinforces her carnal and sexualized identity. By providing these details, Sartre paints the picture of a character that John would find irresistible. Moreover, since Sartre specifies that Abigail lives in John's house, he

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[225] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 5.
[226] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 5.

[227] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 6.

reveals that John is unable to escape her. And like with Elisabeth and John, Sartre reinforces Abigail's character description by highlighting their first interaction. In her initial appearance, Abigail corners John. Sartre writes "Elle est contre lui, il est son prisonnier."[228] As with the initial interaction between Elisabeth and John, this encounter between John and Abigail reveals the core of their relationship. John is prisoner to Abigail's seductive advances.

Sartre does not provide details of his witch characters past familial relationships because he does not believe that past circumstances should have the ability to influence his characters' current identities. For Sartre, identity formation involves recognizing that what happened in the past need not have happened, that present dispositions are not determined, and that the future is wide open to changes. Given these beliefs, Sartre separates himself from the other twentieth-century authors.

Even though Sartre does not describe his witches' familial histories in great detail, he does spend a considerable amount of time describing the Salem society's repressive environment. Like Condé, Hébert, and Vassalli, he suggests that his witches were victims of imposed societal rules that were meant to influence and control their behavior. In this respect, the twentieth-

[228] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 7.

century authors' depictions of witchcraft mirror the ideas of historical scholars such as Robert Muchembled and Andrew Sanders.

In *La Sorcière au village*, Muchembled argues that the "witch" was an unfortunate soul who took the blame for society's misfortunes. According to Muchembled, peasants took comfort in the idea of witchcraft, blamed the witch for any problems, and maintained their superstitious beliefs in witchcraft as a sort of coping mechanism. He suggests that "...les paysans pensent magiquement le monde et ses drames, ce qui leur évite le désespoir total et les aident, tout simplement à vivre."[229] Believing in witchcraft, according to Muchembled, helped ease the tensions in society and made living easier. If peasants could determine, accuse, and eliminate a "witch," they felt that they had some control over the source of their misfortunes. The "witch" was thus, according to Muchembled, an unfortunate scapegoat who was murdered to relieve society of its burdens and maintain the unity of the community in which she lived.

Vassalli and Condé demonstrate Muchembled's theory in *La Chimera* and in *Moi, Tituba sorcière noire de Salem*. In the novels, the inhabitants of the small towns of Zardino and Salem blame Antonia and Tituba for every misfortune that occurs. In *La Chimera*, Vassalli writes that

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[229] Muchembled 104.

> Le parole, gli atti e tutti i movimenti di Antonia cominciarono ad essere seguiti con grandissima attenzione, e interpretati alla luce di ciò che succedeva in seguito, per esempio: Antonia entrava per fare qualcosa in una casa e poi nei giorni successivi in quella stessa casa s'ammalava un bambino, oppure improvvisamente moriva il cane, o un vitello nasceva deforme; ecco il vero motivo – si diceva – per cui lei era stata lì."[230]

Through these words, Vassalli reveals that the inhabitants of Zardino monitored Antonia's every action and were ready to accuse her of causing any hardship that arose. Like in Muchembled's theory, Vassalli demonstrates that his "witch" was simply the scapegoat for Zardino. He suggests that the inhabitants were all too happy to point the finger at Antonia as the reason for the problems in the small village, accuse her of witchcraft, and burn her at the stake.

In *Moi, Tituba sorcière noire de Salem*, Condé's witch protagonist reveals that the inhabitants of Salem, like those of Zardino, were inclined to blame their own problems and fears on witchcraft. They were, according to Tituba, "…écrasés par la présence du Malin parmi eux…"[231] and like in

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[230] Vassalli, *La Chimera* 249-50.

[231] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 104.

Muchembled's theory, they used accusations of witchcraft to curtail their own fears. If a cow died, a child fell ill, or a young girl did not menstruate, they blamed it on some hidden, ill-intentioned presence among them.[232]

Sartre and Hébert also stress the scapegoat theory in their texts. *Soeur* Julie and John's communities in *Les Enfants du Sabbat* and in *Les Sorcières de Salem* want them to suffer for the problems in their societies. Mère Marie-Clothilde smothers *soeur* Julie's newborn in the snow because she blames *soeur* Julie for all of the troubles in the convent and those in power in Salem hang John because he refuses to follow their rules and confess to the crime of witchcraft. In the prologue to *Les Sorcières de Salem*, Sartre describes the Salem society at length, blames the witchcraft accusations on the political and economic situation in Massachusetts, and overtly defines witches as scapegoats when he writes that an unnamed "witch" "payait pour tous. Il fallait bien, n'est-ce pas des boucs-émissaires."[233] Through these words, Sartre reveals that witchcraft in Salem was a means of uniting the Salem inhabitants by allowing one individual to pay for any ills. In all cases

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[232]Condé writes "Une vache qui mourrait, un enfant qui avait des convulsions, une jeune fille qui tardait à connaitre son flot menstruel et c'était matière à spéculations infinies" [Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 104.]

[233] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* A-F.

of twentieth-century literary witches, the "witches" are scapegoats who are eliminated to ensure the unity of their respective communities.

In Sanders's book, *A Deed Without a Name: The Witch in Society and History*, he traces the development of the witch and argues that the witchcraft phenomenon was a projection of the suppressed negative emotions that arise when persons must reconcile their needs to be both members of societies and individuals. In his book, Sanders adopts Max Weber's models of conflict theory and shows how all societies consist of individuals and groups that act in their own interests. He contends that since personal pursuits bring individuals inevitably into competition with each other, witchcraft is a means to eliminate rival competition. In his opinion, societies that are primarily agricultural or that have some sort of non-industrial economy where members interact constantly and have intimate relationships are more likely to suffer from the agonistic aspects of social interdependence.[234]

The importance of social interdependence and rivalries is especially obvious in Sartre's scenario. In *Les Sorcières de Salem*, Sartre highlights the repressiveness of the Salem society, portrays the inhabitants of Salem

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[234] Sanders 21.

and the village as austere and attempts to explain the witchcraft accusations when he writes that

> Le Diable, pour eux, c'était tout. C'était l'Angleterre et sa religion, c'était la tyrannie du Roi de Londres, c'était la crise financière qui venait de les frapper, c'était la guerre désastreuse qu'ils menaient aux frontières du Canada contre les Indiens et les Français, c'était surtout la rancune, la honte et la haine au fond de leurs cœurs divisés.[235]

With this description, Sartre paints a concise picture of the difficult economic, cultural, political, and religious aspects of the self-denying society that his characters had to meet head-on. According to Sartre, their battle against witches was as much of an emotional and trying internal battle as it was external.

The difficulties of the Salem society and its resulting inner turmoil are also extremely obvious in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953). In his play, Miller explains the land war between the inhabitants of Salem, the rivalry over ministerial appointments, and the disagreement over Reverend Parris's salary. He blames Salem's wild and unreasonable justice system for succumbing to the local prejudices and states that

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[235] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* E.

> ...the witch-hunt was a perverse manifestation of the panic which set in among all classes when the balance began to turn toward greater individual freedom ... Land-lust which had been expressed before by constant bickering over boundaries and deeds, could now be elevated to the arena of morality; one could cry witch against one's neighbor and feel perfectly justified in the bargain.[236]

Miller's play, like Sartre's, shows the antagonistic social forces at work in the Salem society and demonstrates how the competition between the inhabitants of Salem over land and material goods combined so that the Salem inhabitants had trouble reconciling their own individual interests with those of the community.

Miller's play and Sartre's scenario thus suggest that the Salem environment and the intense interdependent relationships that it required were bound to breed hostility among its members.

In *The Crucible*, Miller also creates a rivalry between the two main female characters, Abigail and Elizabeth, that demonstrates a different facet of the interdependence of the society. While there are no records of an affair between Abigail and John Proctor in the Salem historical archives, Miller

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[236] Miller 350-1.

admits to constructing one using artistic license. In the Introduction to *The Crucible*, Miller writes

> It was that Abigail Williams, the prime mover of the Salem hysteria, so far as the hysterical children were concerned, had a short time earlier been the house servant of the Proctors and now was crying out Elizabeth Proctor as a witch; but more – it was clear from the record that with entirely uncharacteristic fastidiousness she was refusing to include John Proctor, Elizabeth's husband, in her accusations despite the urgings of the prosecutors. Why? I searched the records of the trials in the courthouse at Salem but in no other instance could I find such a careful avoidance… Only here, in Proctor's case, was there so clear an attempt to differentiate between a wife's culpability and a husband's.[237]

The fact that Abigail accused Elizabeth but wanted to save John made the affair conceivable for Miller.

The sexual tension and rivalry between the two women are variegations of the economic and social rivalries that Sander's describes in his theory. When Miller alters official history by focusing on the sexual

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[237] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 164.

lives of his characters, however, he creates a dichotomy that highlights two absolutes of female sexuality. He depicts Elizabeth, John Proctor's wife, as a chaste and virtuous female who is reminiscent of the Virgin. When she becomes pregnant in spite of being "a cold wife" that "prompts lechery," one cannot help but think of the Immaculate Conception. Abigail stands opposite Elizabeth as the temptress who accuses the others of witchcraft as part of what John Proctor describes as "a whore's vengeance."[238] When the judges believe Abigail's claims and accuse Elizabeth of witchcraft, Miller further hints at the association of Elizabeth and the Virgin and that of Abigail and the whore by allowing John to claim that they "are pulling Heaven down and raising up a whore."[239]

When Miller decides to add the affair between John and Abigail, he rewrites history through a misogynistic lens that ultimately punishes Elizabeth for not sexually satisfying her husband. At the end of Miller's play, Elizabeth states "I have my own sins to count. It needs a cold wife to prompt lechery. … You take my sins upon you, John."[240] Because she has not sexually satisfied her husband, Elizabeth takes the blame for his guilt.

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[238] Miller 428.

[239] Miller 435.

[240] Miller 448.

Sartre also concentrates on the intense competition, sexual tension, and rivalry that occur between Abigail and Elisabeth. In fact, more than Miller, Sartre highlights the fact that Abigail's accusation of John Proctor's wife is primarily based on her desire to replace Elisabeth. In one conversation with John, Abigail even tells him

> Ne crains rien, je n'essaierai pas de te tenter. Tu ne me toucheras pas avant que je sois Maîtresse Proctor. Ne t'inquiètes pas, je ferais tout moi-même. Tu garderas les mains pures.[241]

Through these words, Sartre reveals that accusing Elisabeth of witchcraft is a means for Abigail to take over Elisabeth's role as John's wife. Sartre's scenario thus highlights the intense rivalry that occurs between two females vying for one male's attention and shows how Elisabeth is the victim of Abigail's machinations.

Moreover, Sartre's scenario, even more than Miller's, discloses precise details about the sexual practices of his characters. In one scene, John reveals that Elisabeth has not had sexual relations with him for seven months. He tells her that "depuis sept mois, vous n'êtes plus ma femme."[242]

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[241] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 44.

[242] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 32.

In another, John argues that this lack of sexual relations with his wife is the catalyst that has driven him to sin, makes it known that he has slept with Abigail two times, and says that his wife "le damne parce qu'elle aime trop la vertu."[243] Through these words, John overtly blames Elisabeth's sexual austerity for his actions.

Miller wrote that he did not agree with the added details or "the sexual sophistication injected" into Sartre's version but contended that the "spirit of the film" which highlighted the competition and ills that arise from social interdependence between the Salem inhabitants was correct.[244] Many cinema critics also disliked Sartre's additions. Sheila Huftel, for example, writes that Miller tells precisely "what you need to know and nothing more" and believes that Sartre's film gains nothing by making the characters more subjective. She writes "John Proctor did not become more 'real' by being played as a guilt-torn neurotic. … I watched unmoved while Yves Montand twitched in time to his tormented soul, and came out murmuring that Miller would never have created such a character."[245] Other critics applauded Sartre's changes. Eric Mottram, for example, wrote that the film is "more

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[243] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 33.

[244] Miller wrote this note on the title page of the copy of *Les Sorcières de Salem* which I obtained from the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

[245] Sheila Huftel, "The Crucible," *Modern Critical Interpretations: The Crucible*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1999) 15.

complex than the play, and more convincingly three-dimensional if rather more philosophically dogmatic," that "Proctor's sensuality and his identification of Elisabeth with the God of prohibiting sex and the God of judgment is firmly established" and that "Sartre enters into a general criticism of the Protestant ethic and its relations to sex, money, and power relationships."[246] For Mottram, one of the driving and positive forces of the film is the complex interplay of the rivalries in the sexual relationships.

The critics who viewed Sartre's film were divided on their interpretations of the importance of the added sexual details. What they failed to note, however, is that Sartre corrects Miller's errors in the depiction of his characters' sexual relationships at the end of the play by making it clear that his "witches" are really just victims of the sexual repressiveness of the Salem environment. Sartre's film, more than Miller's play, highlights the fact that Elisabeth's frigidity is the result of the Puritan society's desire to repress sexuality. When Elisabeth begs John to live in the final scene and promises to love him "de tout mon corps" John knows that such love would be impossible in the Salem society. He responds "Ton corps, ton pauvre corps, ils l'ont tué"[247] By adding a few lines, Satre shifts the blame from

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[246] Eric Mottram, "Jean-Paul Sartre's Les *Sorcières de Salem*," *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1972) 93.

[247] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 139.

Elisabeth to the repressive sexual code of conduct that the Salem society demands of its women. Unlike Miller, he makes it clear that the society's mores are based on a dualist religious outlook that denies nature by identifying the body and its desires with sin. Sartre thus shows that the relationship between Elisabeth and John is a reflection of the contradictory expectations that characterized the society's patriarchal attitudes toward women.

Hébert, Vassalli, and Condé also suggest that their characters are victims of the sexual repressiveness of their communities. More than Sartre, however, Hébert, Vassalli, and Condé suggest that the "witch" was a female who laid claim to her own sexuality and tried to extend the patriarchal boundaries that constricted her sexual desire. With their novels, they demonstrate the extent to which feminine sexuality had to confront the myth of "woman" and the cultural discourses that sought to frame and negate feminine desire.

In her article "Voix Sexualisée au Féminin dans *Moi, Tituba sorcière*," Florence Ramond Jurney demonstrates that Tituba embraces her sexuality in many different forms. She suggests that Tituba's sexual agency contrasts sharply with that of her mother, Abena, and that Tituba constantly

pushes the boundaries of her own sexual desires in spite of her mother's suggestion that she should learn to repress her sexuality. Jurney points out that Tituba explores lesbian love with Hester, a relationship that she claims is "unique dans la littérature des Caraïbes,"[248] occupies a double position in her relationship with Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo when she both shares his bed and acts as his servant, and expresses her sexual desires for the much younger Christopher, who Tituba refers to as her "fils-amant" long after society expects her to have abandoned her sexual desires. Jurney contends that Condé stresses the variety of these sexual experiences to demonstrate that Tituba experiences physical fulfillment and empowerment beyond that of traditional heterosexism. Tituba is, according to Jurney, "... une femme qui se raconte, se parle, se sexualise, et qui en faisant cela transgresse délibérément les limites de la tradition."[249] In a similar article entitled "Feminine Transgression and Crossing Over: Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba Black Witch of Salem*" Amy Lee writes that Tituba's sexual relationships in the novel demonstrate that feminine sexuality is not "a silent, a lack,

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[248] Florence Ramond Jurney, "Voix Sexualisée au Féminin dans Moi, Tituba sorcière de Maryse Condé," *The French Review* 76.6 (2003): 1168.

[249] Jurney 1169.

submissive, and shapeless complement to aggressive maleness."[250] For both Jurney and Lee, Tituba destabilizes the patriarchal and colonial laws governing female sexuality, transgresses the limits of tradition, and openly explores new possibilities.

Vassalli and Hébert's witch characters, like Tituba, challenge the dominant norms governing female sexuality by embracing their sexualities. In the article "Deux Dames du Précieux Sang: à Propos des *Enfants du Sabbat* d'Anne Hébert" Judith English and Jacqueline Viswanathan concentrate on the role that blood plays in Hébert's novel and use it to demonstrate that sœur Julie never resists sexuality or her body. Unlike *Soeur* Gemma who is disgusted by her own blood and body, they write that the vision of *soeur* Julie "...triomphante, les cuisses ouvertes et ruisselantes de sang, représente un défi aux tabous millénaires qui dictent la honte ou du moins une pudique discrétion à toute femme ainsi "souillée."'[251] Sœur Julie, they claim, is triumphantly immodest. Stanley Pean writes that Hébert's witch "...fait éclater les images reçues de la femme exprimées par la figure

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[250] Amy Lee, "Feminine Transgression and Crossing Over: Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba Black Witch of Salem*," *Gender and Sexuality in African Literature and Film*, ed. Ada Uzoamaka Azodo (Trenton: Africa World, 2007) 134.

[251] Judith English and Jacqueline Viswanathan, "Deux dames du précieux-sang: à propos des *Enfants du Sabbat* d'Anne Hébert," *Présence Francophone* 22 printemps (1981): 112.

du triptyque vierge/mère/putain."[252] Rather than adopt the traditional roles prescribed to women, he contends that sœur Julie explores and expands the boundaries of acceptable female sexual practices. Ruth Glynn notes that Vassalli portrays women as "flesh and blood, sexual creatures" and even "locates Providence in the sexuality of women."[253] She suggests that Vassalli explores the Church's conflation of womanhood and inferiority to demonstrate the anti-religious ideological position of the patriarchal society in which Antonia lived. In spite of the boundaries that Antonia faces, she contends that Vassalli demonstrates that Antonia learns about sex at an early age, engages in sexual activities with an older foundling, and embraces and relishes in her own sexuality.

Rather than present the witch as an inherently evil figure and a condemnation of sexuality and knowledge in women, the twentieth-century authors rehabilitate the witch figure by demonstrating that the "witch" was really just a victim of the prejudices and customs of the society in which she lived. Witches, for Sartre, Vassalli, Hébert, and Condé are the unlucky losers of the narratives who pay for the misfortunes of their communities. Antonia, John, and Tituba pay with their lives when they are murdered for

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[252] Pean 30.

[253] Glynn 91.

their "crimes;" only *soeur* Julie escapes with her life intact when she leaves undetected in the dead of night after the chaplain and the mother superior smother her newborn child.

Hébert, Vassalli, Condé, and Sartre's narratives thus demonstrate the extent to which subjectivity and identity are subject to the social, economic, and political systems through which they are formed. They also demonstrate the dangers of those witch characters that go against the norm. Through their stories, Condé, Vassalli, Sartre and Hébert humanize the witch figure by exposing the ways in which dominant discourses construct and manipulate the epithet of "witch" to dominate and contain individuals and groups who are different from and defiant of the social order. They show how the "witch" was a female who challenged the traditional and patriarchal view of sexuality espoused by her society, was the victim of her genealogy, and suffered from the judgments and rumors that circulated in her community. By creating their witch characters in a way that highlights the importance of all of these factors, the twentieth-century authors revise history by transforming transgressive "witch" figures into positive images of female identity. They rehabilitate, demystify, and explain the witch. As Saint-Martin notes

> Dans l'imaginaire masculin traditionnel, surtout celui de l'Eglise, la sorcière est une créature hideuse et terrifiante, qui jette des sorts, pratique des messes noires et fornique avec le diable. En elle se cache l'Autre absolue, la plus pure expression du Mal qu'on attribue à l'ensemble des 'filles d'Eve.'[254]

Instead of writing stories that subscribe to the definition of an evil witch, Hébert, Vassalli, Condé, and Sartre write stories that emphasize her victimization and that challenge negative definitions. With their texts, the twentieth-century authors point out that the very idea of the "witch" must be reconfigured.

[254] Saint-Martin 166.

Chapter 4
Hébert and the Fantastic Witch

Les sorcières sont des révélateurs, des révélatrices de ce qui existe de latente en chacun de nous…[255]

-Anne Hébert

In chapter two, I argued that the witch is a fantastic character because she is simultaneously human and superhuman. I also suggested that the witch exists in a fantastic space because she forces those who accuse her of witchcraft to hesitate between a normal explanation of her actions and a paranormal one. I contended that this fantastic space is present as long as the witch compels us to question our own understanding of reality and as long as the witch subsists in the "hesitation" that we experience when we attempt to either credit her with supernatural powers or ground her in the real world.

In Todorov's *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, he highlights his belief that that the reader and the character provide a critical interpretative function. First, Todorov suggests that the reader, at the end of a fantastic tale, must make a decision that forces him to abandon the

[255] Anne Hébert, "Je ne suis en colère que lorsque j'écris," by Paule Lebrun. *Châtelaine*. 1976. 42.

hesitation that characterizes the fantastic.[256] He argues that the ambiguity of the story can remain until the end but maintains that either the reader or one of the characters in the story must play an active role in the story's interpretation. He declares that the reader or the character holds the final interpretative key and, in the end, decodes the narrative in a way that pushes it out of the fantastic and into one of two neighboring genres.[257] The fantastic, according to Todorov, only exists until the reader makes a decision that forces the text into either the marvelous or the uncanny.[258]

If we apply Todorov's reasoning to the witch, we realize that she suffers from the same fate. When we admit that she possesses supernatural powers, we push her into the marvelous. If we do not believe that she can accomplish paranormal feats, the witch enters into the uncanny. To use Todorov's words, the uncanny witch "ramène l'inexplicable à des faits connus, à une expérience préalable" and the marvelous witch "correspond à

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[256]Todorov 46 and 175.

[257] Todorov writes that "Le fantastique, nous l'avons vu, ne dure que le temps d'une hésitation: hésitation commune au lecteur et au personnage, qui doivent décider si ce qu'ils perçoivent relève ou non de la "réalité", telle qu'elle existe pour l'opinion commune. A la fin de l'histoire, le lecteur, sinon le personnage, prend toutefois une décision, il opte pour l'une ou l'autre solution, et par là même sort du fantastique." [Todorov 46.]

[258] Todorov writes that "Le fantastique mène donc une vie pleine de dangers, et peut s'évanouir à tout instant. Il paraît se placer plutôt à la limite de deux genres, le merveilleux et l'étrange, qu'être un genre autonome." [Todorov 46].

un phénomène inconnu, encore jamais vu."[259] In each case, the witch loses the ability to exist in the "in between" state that exists amid the superhuman and the human. The marvelous witch becomes a superhuman creature and the uncanny witch becomes a normal human being. Both depictions of the witch nullify the fantastic effect.

The second important point of Todorov's theory involves cultural reasons for the disappearance of the fantastic genre. In *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, he contends that the fantastic is a literary genre that appeared at the end of the eighteenth century and had a "vie relativement brève" before dying at the end of the nineteenth century. Citing Maupassant's tales as the last aesthetically satisfying examples of the genre, he devotes the final two chapters of his text to a literary quandary "...pourquoi la littérature fantastique n'existe-t-elle plus?"[260] After a somewhat lengthy analysis, Todorov answers his own question and accredits its disappearance to the fact that literature can now openly address the forbidden themes that constitute the supernatural including incest, homosexuality, love, necrophilia, and excessive sensuality in undisguised terms. He boldly contends that psychoanalysis has replaced the fantastic

[259] Todorov 47.

[260] Todorov 175.

genre and even goes so far as to claim that the fantastic, as a literary genre, is now useless.[261]

But Todorov's characterization of the fantastic raises many questions when we apply his theories to narratives of witchcraft.

Do we, as readers, really have to make a decision that forces the text out of the fantastic?

Has psychoanalysis really replaced the fantastic?

What would it mean if our fantastic witch remained in the zone of narrative

that constitutes the fantastic?

In this chapter, I will attempt to answer these questions by demonstrating how Anne Hébert manages to construct a fantastic character. Many scholars have written on the fantastic nature of Hébert's novel. Gloria Escomel argues that *Les Enfants du sabbat* is one of the few true representations of the fantastic,[262] Marie Couillard defines the novel as a "fantastic subversion"

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[261]He writes that "La psychanalyse a remplacé (et par la même a rendu inutile) la littérature fantastique. On n'a pas besoin aujourd'hui d'avoir recours au diable pour parler d'un désir sexuel excessif, ni aux vampires pour désigner l'attirance exercée par les cadavres : la psychanalyse, et la littérature qui, directement ou indirectement s'en inspire, en traite en termes non déguisés." [Todorov 169.]

[262] Gloria Escomel, "La Littérature Fantastique au Québec: *Les Enfants du sabbat,*" *Requiem* IV (1978) : 30-2.

narrative,[263] and Maria Cristina Batalha and André Vanasse suggest that Hébert chose to write a fantastic text because it was the only literary genre that could account for Quebec's national identity crisis. [264] Like Todorov, the majority of these scholars suggest that the reader must make a decision at the end of the text. The reader, they claim, must decide whether *soeur* Julie is truly a witch or whether there are rational explanations for all of her seemingly supernatural feats. And yet, as we will see, the scholars remain divided. Some believe that *soeur* Julie possesses paranormal powers. Others, though fewer, maintain that Hébert provides rational explanations for every supernatural occurrence in the novel.

André Brochu defines *soeur* Julie is a "sorcière accomplie" and claims that her association with witchcraft makes *Les Enfants du sabbat* "...le livre le plus véritablement sacrilège de notre littérature."[265] Virginia Harger-Grinling suggests that *soeur* Julie is a witch, a marginal figure in society, and a metaphor for the marginal nature of Québec.[266] Elodie Rousselot also

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[263] Marie Couillard, "*Les Enfants du sabbat d'Anne Hebert*: un recit de subversion fantastique," *Incidences* IV. 2-3 (1980): 77-80.

[264] Maria Cristina Batalha, "Le Fantastique et l'enjeu identitaire dans *Les Enfants du sabbat*," *Les Cahiers du Gerf* 26 (2003-4): 141-54.

[265] André Brochu, *Anne Hébert: le secret de vie et de mort* (Ottawa: Presses Universitaires d'Ottawa, 2000) 144.

[266] Virginia Harger-Grinling,"Sorcières, sorciers et le personnage féminine dans l'oeuvre d'Anne Hébert," *Etudes canadiennes* (1994) : 7.

comments on the nonconformity of the protagonist and believes that *soeur* Julie embraces her status as a witch as part of a process of self-discovery.[267] Neil Bishop believes that *soeur* Julie engages her inner witch because she suffers from Freudian penis envy. He contends that *soeur* Julie enjoys being a witch and being raped by her father because it is the only means by which she can associate with phallocentric power.[268] Isabelle Boisclair believes, on the contrary, that *soeur* Julie's decision to become a witch demonstrates that female solidarity trumps male domination. She sees the protagonist's choice as a move against her brother and towards her mother and her "gift" of witchcraft.[269]

While they differ considerably in their interpretations of the literary significance of the witch, the above scholars all confer this supernatural identity label upon *soeur* Julie. In several other articles written on *Les*

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[267] Rousselot writes that "Such superior strength and vigour make it clear that Julie needs to accept the marginal nature of her origins in order to be liberated from the tyranny of a normalising social structure. Ultimately we see her making her own choices and embracing her status of witch as the one in which she is best able to express and fulfill herself." [Elodie Rousselot, "'Otherness and the Quest for a Sense of Identity in Anne Hébert's Les Enfants du sabbat and Le Premier jardin," *Identity and Alterity in Canadian Literature*, ed. Ana Olos and Dana Puiu Baia Mare: North University Baia Mare Press, 2003) 233.]

[268] Bishop suggests that "On peut raisonnablement en conclure que Julie envie à son père ce pouvoir, et ce phallus le manifeste. Il n'y a que deux manières pour elle de s'associer à ce pouvoir et a ce phallus : en arriver, malgré sa douleur et son dégout initiaux, à accepter de s'incorporer (accepter in son corps) le phallus paternel, et remplacer sa mère comme partenaire sexuelle de Satan et comme sorcière" (135). [Neil Bishop, "L'extrême ou *Les Enfants du sabbat*" *Cahiers Anne Hébert* (2004) : 125-44.]

[269] Boisclair suggests that sœur Julie and her mother's actions in the novel are proof that "...c'est la solidarité qui est manifestée, suggérant que les femmes doivent s'entraider, se protéger l'une l'autre dans ce monde patriarcal ." [Isabelle Boisclair, "La Solidarité comme réponse à la domination masculine : étude de deux motifs genres dans l'œuvre d'Anne Hébert," Féminin/Masculin dans l'œuvre d'Anne Hébert, (Sherbrooke: Editions Fides, 2008) 33-4.]

Enfants du sabbat, however, scholars question *soeur* Julie's supernatural powers and hesitate to define the protagonist as a witch. Gabriele Poulin believes that Mère Marie-Clothilde de la Croix uses *soeur* Julie to affirm her own power.[270] Lilian Pestre de Almeida suggests that the nuns imagine that *soeur* Julie has supernatural powers in order to combat the tedium and boredom of life in the convent. She writes that "...elles s'ennuient trop les sœurs. Elles ont besoin, très fortement, du théâtre que Julie leur apporte. Elles le désirent du fond de leur âme."[271] Witchcraft, according to these two scholars, is more of a game than it is a reality. They suggest that the other characters in the novel resort to labeling *soeur* Julie as a witch in an attempt to ameliorate their own monotonous existences. Delbert Russell questions sœur Julie's supernatural status and provides the most critical look at her seemingly paranormal acts when he writes that

> The supernatural acts associated with Julie are all reduced to rational ones within the novel... The signs on her hands and her scratched skin...can be explained by the ulcers, eczema, and

[270] Poulin suggests that Mère Marie-Clothilde de la Croix labels sœur Julie as a witch so that can establish her own power. She writes that sœur Julie is "...un rival puissant, reconnus présent par toute la communauté" (310). [Gabriele Poulin, "Qui sont les 'Enfants du sabbat,'" *Lettres Québecoises* 1.1 (1975): 300-25.]

[271] Lilian Pestre de Almeida, "Le Jeu parodique et temporel sur un fond de désespoir: les problèmes du roman dans *Les Enfants du sabbat*" *Anne Hébert, Parcours d'une œuvre: Actes du colloque de la Sorbonne* (Montréal: L'Hexagone, 1997) 350.

> cysts... Her movements outside her room are made possible by the use of the ropes and pulleys... Her miraculous pregnancy can be ascribed to Dr. Painchaud...[272]

Russell believes that the leaders of the convent wish to believe in the demonic possession of *soeur* Julie, argues that she is the victim of self delusions, and contends that the other members of the religious community project the responsibility for their darker fantasies onto her.[273] His delineations of Hébert's logical underpinnings make us realize that *soeur* Julie is more complex than a mere witch.

Whether or not *soeur* Julie is a witch is thus a matter of contention among scholars. What has remained largely ignored among these same scholars, however, is whether or not *soeur* Julie might suffer from hysteria. In an interview with Donald Smith, Hébert herself admits that sœur Julie could be hysteric. She states that "Dans *Les Enfants du sabbat*, on peut dire que peut-être sœur Julie est folle, hystérique, et qu'elle s'imagine tout."[274] In another interview with André Vanasse, Hébert suggests that her main

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[272]Delbert Russell, *Anne Hébert* (Boston: Twayne, 1983) 103.

[273]Russell 100.

[274] Anne Hébert, "Anne Hébert et les eaux troubles de l'imaginaire," interview with Donald Smith, *Lettres Québécoises* 20 (1980): 72.

character is ambiguous and that she could be either a witch *or* a hysteric. She claims

> Je pourrais analyser Julie de la Trinité et en faire une folle. D'ailleurs, elle est folle, cette femme, c'est tout simple, c'est une malade, c'est une hystérique, mais je ne le dis pas. Au lecteur de la découvrir folle ou sorcière.[275]

In this interview, Hébert blatantly states that sœur Julie is either a witch *or* a hysteric and she, like Todorov, is unashamed in her claim that the reader has to decide how to interpret *soeur* Julie's actions. As we will see, however, despite Hébert's candid avowal of the significance of her literary figure, her novel provides arguments for both identities and choosing between the two is not quite as simple as Hébert makes it seem.

Part of the difficulty in defining *soeur* Julie lies in Hébert's descriptions of the protagonist. Although Hébert suggests that *soeur* Julie might suffer from hysteria in interviews, it is important to note that she never labels her as a hysteric in the novel. She references "le mal des cloîtres," a term linked with hysteria, but she refuses to circumscribe her protagonist's identity by labeling her as such.[276] Thus while she evokes

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[275] Anne Hébert, interview with Vanasse 443.

[276] For a discussion of "le mal des cloîtres" and its relation to hysteria, see Michelet's *Louis XIV et la révocation de l'Edit de Nantes* where he explains the story of Madeleine Bavent and the nuns of Louviers

hysteria, it remains a mere suggestion. Likewise, Hébert does not use the word witch, "sorcière," prior to the Sabbat, and for the majority of the novel, she uses the word to describe Philomène, not *soeur* Julie.[277]

As we will see, *soeur* Julie's symptoms and bizarre behavior are reminiscent of hysteria. But her alleged supernatural feats lead us to believe that the protagonist is a witch. Hébert, for her part, refuses to employ either of these classifications. Instead, *soeur* Julie occupies many different selves. The other characters in the novel add to *soeur* Julie's convoluted nature and further trouble her identification as a witch or as a hysteric. *Soeur* Julie's religious sisters interpret her powers as miracles and wonder if they might come from God.[278] Several of these nuns believe that *soeur* Julie can resolve the difficulties in their lives. They view her as a healer and when they pass her room, they hope to breathe the air that she has exhaled. *Soeur* Julie's door becomes a veritable shrine for the despondent nuns who brush their dresses on its wooden panels in the hopes of finding solace for their ills. La

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who were, according to Yvelin, "victimes...agitées du mal des cloîtres...hystériques, gonflées d'orages à la matrice, lunatiques, et dévoyées d'esprit." [Jules Michelet, *Louis XIV et la révocation de l'Edit de Nantes* (Charleston: Book Surge, 2000) 463.]

[277] Hébert describes Philomène as a witch eleven times in the novel before Julie accepts the label. See pages (44, 99, 107, 108, 110, 116, 118). Joseph calls sœur Julie a "sorcière" on page 153 of the novel. This is the first time that the term is applied to sœur Julie. And soeur Julie only accepts the identity label herself when she refers to the entity that she forms with her mother. "Il faut que la sorcière meure dans le désespoir. C'est elle! C'est ma mère. C'est moi. Je suis elle et elle est moi. Je brûle! C'est mon tour à présent." [Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 161.]

[278] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 126.

soeur infirmière even believes that *soeur* Julie is a saint and wishes to keep her dirty linens as relics.[279]

Hébert's witch character thus tellingly confuses the other characters in the novel. And for the reader who must interpret all of these seemingly contradictory descriptions, *soeur* Julie is even more troubling. She confuses us precisely because she does not wholly conform to any identity. Depending on the chapter, *soeur* Julie seems to be a saint, a hysteric, a victim of her situation in the convent, a victim of paternal rape, the target of child abuse, a seductress, a witch, and a murderer. But Hébert never labels her protagonist as any of these identities.

As I will show in the pages that follow, *soeur* Julie, forces the reader to hesitate between a rational, human identity (hysteric) and a supernatural, superhuman (witch) identity. In the first part of this chapter, I will argue that Hébert relies extensively on psychoanalysis in *Les Enfants du sabbat* and utilizes it to help her create a fantastic character. As stated above, Todorov believed that psychoanalysis replaced the fantastic. But Hébert uses psychoanalysis to construct her fantastic witch-like character.

In the first section I will demonstrate how Hébert makes use of Freud's theories on hysteria. The extent to which she relies on Freud's

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[279] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 126.

theories is remarkable and has not been noted in any studies thus far. Freud's copious writings on hysteria including *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) will provide the theoretical material needed to demonstrate how Hébert uses Freud's template.

Because Hébert constructs the identity of her witch-like character using Freud's theories, she demonstrates that psychoanalysis and the fantastic can coexist. But *soeur* Julie's identity, as stated above, is exceedingly complex. And before we fault Hébert for choosing Freud's misogynistic discourse to help construct her hysteric-like character, we must realize that she also writes against Freud's theories on hysteria. In the second section of this chapter, I will highlight *soeur* Julie's witch-like qualities and demonstrate how soeur Julie, as a witch, defies the very theories and identity parameters that she seemed to follow.

Soeur Julie the Hysteric

Hébert's decision to have *soeur* Julie's identity vacillate between two extremes (witch and hysteric) was perhaps influenced by Freud's association of the two. As stated in chapter two, Hébert admitted being profoundly influenced by psychoanalysis. Or perhaps the link between hysteria and witchcraft formed part of the zeitgeist of the 1970's. The Bibliothèque Nationale's exposition *Les Sorcières* in 1973 linked witches with hysteria. And Hébert had a copy of the book that accompanied the exposition in her personal library.[280] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément's *La Jeune Née* (1975), which was published in the same year as *Les Enfants du sabbat*, compared the witch and the hysteric. And Michel de Certeau's *La Posession de Loudun* (1970) suggested that the possessed, like the hysteric, suffered from unconscious memories and was the victim of the Devil's evil machinations.[281]

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[280] Maxime Préaud, *Les Sorcières* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1973).

[281] Freud influenced Michel de Certeau who also connects witches with possession using psychoanalytic terminology in *La Possession de Loudun* (1970). De Certeau argues that possession allowed women to publicly confess their "sins" and be liberated from them. He suggests that, like the hysteric women, the possessed were victims of their unconscious. He explains that "Les possédées sont des victimes. Un autre – diable ou sorcier – est responsable. Elles se libèrent donc de la faute dans le moment où elles la confessent publiquement, dans l'église au cours d'un spectacle qui est encore pour elles une liturgie. … On n'a plus que de 'bonnes' religieuses. Ce qui les autorise à déclarer enfin, sous le voile du diable: Je suis cela, est précisément ce qui leur permet de s'en protéger; de se dire: Je ne le suis pas; de demander aux représentants de l'Eglise: Dites-moi que ce n'est pas moi." [Michel de Certeau, *La Possession de Loudun* (Paris: Julliard, 1970) 149.]

Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) and his mentor Josef Breuer (1842 – 1949) were among the first to claim that there was an enormous resemblance between the witch and the hysteric. Freud believed that hysteria was the modern equivalent to the medieval diagnosis of possession, and in several letters to his friend and colleague, Wilheim Fleiss (1858 – 1929), he wrote of witchcraft and made comparisons between witches and hysterical patients. In a letter dated January 17, 1897, he asked Fleiss

> What would you say, by the way, if I told you that all of my brand-new prehistory of hysteria is already known and was published a hundred times over, though several centuries ago? Do you remember that I always said that the medieval theory of possession held by the ecclesiastical courts was identical with our theory of a foreign body and the splitting of consciousness?[282]

In another letter, he admitted to Fleiss that he had ordered a copy of the *Malleus Maleficarum* and acknowledged his desire to continue studying witchcraft.

For Freud, possession and hysteria were examples of the conflict that can exist between the desires of the conscious mind and the unconscious

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[282] Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilheim Fleiss*. Trans. and ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1985) 225.

mind. Both Freud and Breuer believed that hysteric symptoms were repressed memories that subsisted in an altered physical state. Painful memories, they argued, caused mental anguish. And mental sufferings became the physical symptoms that could be trivial or debilitating – a persistent cough, an intermittent stammer, a paralyzed limb. Since these hysteric symptoms were physical symptoms that had a psychological rather than organic cause, the two doctors contended that the hysteric patient could be relieved of her symptoms if she worked through them in analysis.

Hysteria, as an illness, however, preceded both modern diagnoses and psychoanalysis. Originally, it was thought that hysteria was the result of problems with the female sexual and reproductive organs. The term "hysteria" comes from the Greek medical term for the womb, hystera. Hippocrates and Plato believed that hysteria was caused by a wandering womb that had remained barren too long after puberty and argued that the womb had to be coaxed back into place so that it might resume normal functioning. Doctors encouraged hysterics to marry, have intercourse, and try to become pregnant. According to medical authorities, women who succeeded in conceiving had wombs that returned to their normal positions and functions.

More than twenty centuries later, Freud and Breuer continued this line of thinking. They viewed sexuality as needing fulfillment and remarked that their hysteric patients had "remarkably underdeveloped" sexualities.[283] But Freud and Breuer also went beyond previous theories by arguing that the repression of sexual desires or of past sexual experiences could lead to hysteria. They argued that if women tried to contain their sexual longings by repressing or ignoring their sexuality or if they chose to bury memories of sexual experiences in their unconscious, they might develop hysteric symptoms. In fact, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud argued that sexuality was at the core of hysteria.[284] It had become, for Freud, both the potential problem and the keystone of mental life.

Since Hébert constructs her protagonist in accordance with Freud's theories on hysteria, it is not surprising to find that sœur Julie represses her sexuality. As we will see, this repression, in turn, leads to the hysteric

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[283] In *Studies in Hysteria*, Breuer writes concerning Anna O. that "The element of sexuality was remarkably underdeveloped: the patient, whose life became transparent to be in a way that seldom happens between people, had never been in love, and not once in the mass of hallucinations that occurred during her illness did this element of inner life emerge." [Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria* Trans. Nicola Luckhurst (New York: Penguin Books, 2004) 25.]

[284]He writes "I must first explain – as I have already done in other writings – that all my experience shows that these psychoneuroses are based on sexual instinctual forces. By this I do not merely mean that the energy of the sexual instinct makes a contribution to the forces that maintain the pathological manifestations (the symptoms). I mean expressly to assert that the contribution is the most important and only constant source of energy of the neurosis and that in consequence the sexual life of the persons in question is expressed – whether exclusively or principally or only partly – in these symptoms." [Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* Trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000) 29.]

symptoms that make *soeur* Julie's life in the convent unbearable. At the beginning of the novel, however, we have no idea why *soeur* Julie experiences such bizarre symptoms. As readers, we discover the protagonist's hysteria by piecing together the different clues that Hébert dispenses throughout the novel.

Soeur Julie's burn marks are the first indication that Hébert meant to construct her witch character in accordance with Freud's theories. We learn of these burn marks early in the novel when the protagonist complains

> Je ne puis plus supporter la coiffe. Elle me brûle comme du feu. Notre mère supérieure vous le dira. Elle a vu, de ses yeux vu, les traces rouges dans mon cou, sur mon front et ma nuque. Cela me serre comme un étau. Des tenailles de fer terribles...[285]

As readers, we have no idea why the protagonist suffers from these burns. All we know is that *soeur* Julie believes the burns are related to her religious garb. It is only later that we realize that these burn marks are a visual and physical sign of some sort of repression.[286]

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[285] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 13.

[286] Sœur Julie also develops blisters on her hands during Lent. These blisters, like the burn marks, signal her hysteria.

Soeur Julie's scorch marks are not the only extraordinary detail of her existence in the convent. She also suffers from strange attacks that interrupt her life and signal her out among the other nuns. She falls into trancelike states in the middle of her work, for example, and is not awakened by the other nuns prodding and poking her body. Hébert describes these strange occurrences several times in the novel. In one instance in the wash house, *soeur* Julie seems to feel nothing and to be pliable in the other nuns' hands.[287] Her religious sisters are astonished and amazed by *soeur* Julie's behavior and they maneuver her arms and legs, treating her like a life-size "poupée mécanique."[288]

As they move and manipulate the body of their real-life mechanical doll without awakening her, *soeur* Julie begins making erotic and sexually charged gestures. Hébert describes *soeur* Julie's actions writing that

> Bientôt le vague sourire de *soeur* Julie se change en un fou rire irrépressible. Elle est secouée, de la tête aux pieds, par une tempête de plaisir, comme si on la chatouillait. Sœur Julie ne

[287] Hébert writes that "Sœur Julie continue de dormir, debout dans la vapeur du lavoir. Sa respiration est profonde et large. Parfaitement béate, sœur Julie ne s'appuie à rien. Toutes les sœurs se sont arrêtées de travailler pour regarder dormir sœur Julie. Personne ne s'avise d'essayer de la réveiller, tant le spectacle est impressionnant. A un moment donné, pourtant, sœur Leonard tire sœur Julie par le bras pour l'éloigner de la cuve, de peur qu'elle ne tombe dedans. Le bras de sœur Julie reste éloigné de son corps là où l'a tiré sœur Leonard. Sœur Leonard tire l'autre bras de sœur Julie, fort en arrière, et le bras demeure dans cette position, raide et immobile" (59).

[288] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 59.

> se réveille toujours pas. Elle tire la langue comme si elle mangeait une glace. Son ventre et sa croupe s'agitent frénétiquement, d'une façon fort indécente.[289]

Soeur Julie's hip thrusts and tongue movements are unbecoming and inappropriate for a woman in her position. She seems to be in an orgasmic trance that reveals her repressed desires and sexuality. The other nuns are outraged at her behavior and douse her with water in an attempt to stop the indecent sexual movements. And even *soeur* Julie is aware of the inappropriateness of her movements; when she awakens and returns to her identity as nun, she begs to be forgiven of her sins.[290]

Hébert's description of *soeur* Julie in these strange states is the second indication that she meant to construct her witch protagonist in accordance with the theories on hysteria. If we examine *soeur* Julie's actions during these bizarre occurrences, we realize that Hébert's protagonist suffers from what Freud described as "attacks" of hysteria.

When Freud first began studying hysteria, it was with Jean-Martin Charcot (1825 – 1893), a famous French neurologist who practiced and

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[289] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 59.

[290] Hébert writes "Giflée, aspergée d'eau glacée, sœur Julie revient à elle. Elle tombe à genoux, sur les carreaux mouillés, aux pieds de la supérieure, la suppliant d'une petite voix fausse d'avoir pitié d'elle et de lui pardonner ses péchés ." [Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 58-9.]

taught in Paris. Freud attended Charcot's lectures at the Salpêtrière hospital and witnessed Charcot using hypnosis to induce hysteria in his patients. According to Charcot, hysterical women were prone to violent seizures that consisted of several distinct phases. In order to demonstrate the extent of their disorder, Charcot hypnotized his patients before an audience of men and then demonstrated what he believed to be a cycle of hysteric behavior. In the "epileptoid" phase, the patient lost consciousness and often foamed at the mouth. In the second phase, the phase of "clownism," the patient engaged in a variety of eccentric physical contortions. In the hallucinatory phase of "attitudes passionnelles," the eccentric positions of clownism transformed into sexual poses. The hysteric attack concluded with an "arc-en-cercle" backbend.

Lest we not be sure that Hébert intended for *soeur* Julie to suffer from hysteric attacks, we should consider the bouts of hysteria that she describes in the novel. During each attack, like during the attack in the wash house, *soeur* Julie seems unaware of what is occurring around her. She loses consciousness and seems to be sleeping. In other words, *soeur* Julie is hypnotized. During the hypnosis, *soeur* Julie, like in Charcot's demonstrations, begins mimicking sexual movements. In one attack, the overtly sexual poses of the nun shock Mère Marie-Clothilde so much that

when *soeur* Julie awakens from the attack, she notices that her superior has changed positions and now holds "un haut-le-cœur, comme si *soeur* Julie, agenouillée à ses pieds, venait de mimer devant elle une scène indécente, très compromettante pour la supérieure et toute la communauté."[291] In the attack at the wash house, *soeur* Julie thrusts her hips and mimics a licking motion with her tongue.

These sexual gestures are not Hébert's only clue that *soeur* Julie is undergoing a hysteric attack. In another telling description, sœur Julie ends her unconscious attack with the recognizable "arc-en-cercle" backbend. During this attack, the chaplain describes the body movements of *soeur* Julie at the end of the hysteric attack and remarks "Il est à noter la position extraordinaire du corps tendu de cette fille, courbé comme un arc, la tête rejoignant presque les talons. Ceci dépasse tout à fait les forces de la nature..."[292] *Soeur* Julie, like Charcot's patients, concludes this attack with the recognized backbend that signified hysteria. Hébert's inclusion of this detail is evidence of her intention.

In the scene in the wash house, the other nuns liken the protagonist's body during the hysteric attacks to that of a mechanical doll. Through this

[291] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 21.

[292] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 91.

comparison, they suggest that *soeur* Julie's body is an aimless material form that they can play with and control. When we realize that Hébert is mimicking a hysteric attack, however, we understand that this is not the case. As readers familiar with the stages of the hysteric attack, we realize that *soeur* Julie's actions and body are revealing messages that cannot be verbalized. Later in the novel, Hébert emphasizes this idea when she compares her protagonist's body to another type of doll. She states that *soeur* Julie's body operates like a ventriloquist's dummy and that she uses it to verbalize her feelings in an unconventional manner.[293]

Soeur Julie's body movements during the attacks are important because Freud wrote in *Studies in Hysteria* that his patients' behavior during the attacks exposed "the hallucinatory reproduction of a memory that was significant for the outbreak of the hysteria."[294] Armed with this knowledge, we can analyze the scene in the wash house and conclude that *soeur* Julie is speaking through her body to reveal ideas that she cannot openly express in the convent. Her sexual gestures and actions during the attack reveal what *soeur* Julie is actively repressing; her gyrating hips, tongue movements, and

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[293] Hébert writes "Toute une série d'imprécations s'échappent à présent non seulement de sa bouche, mais de toutes les parties de son corps, comme si elle était devenue ventriloque." [Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 90.]

[294] Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria* 16.

sexual poses reveal that the protagonist's hysteria is the result of sexual experiences.

Hébert's decision to focus on *soeur* Julie's sexuality is the third indication that she meant to construct her protagonist according to Freud's theories on hysteria. Freud initially thought that women suffered from hysteria because they repressed memories of sexual abuse. In particular, he believed that hysteric women were victims of paternal rape. Conforming to Freud's theory, Hébert describes her protagonist as a "fille de viol et d'inceste" and paints a disturbing picture of the incestuous relationship that exists between *soeur* Julie and her father. In one instance, Hébert's description of a rape scene makes us shudder with repulsion. *Soeur* Julie explains

> L'homme roux se couche sur moi. Il prétend qu'il est le diable. Moi, je crois que c'est mon père. Mon père est le diable. Il ne me menace plus de me tuer si je crie. Il me laisse crier parce qu'il n'y a plus personne dans la cabane ni aux alentours. Et plus il aime que je crie.[295]

Hébert creates a horrifying picture of a young girl whose father enjoys having her scream while he molests her. In this scene, we realize that *soeur*

[295] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 64.

Julie is the victim of her father's sexual desires and the target of child abuse. Alone in the woods with her rapist, her only choice is to allow her body to be violated.

Hébert's decision to focus on her protagonist's sexuality as the source of her hysteric symptoms is not the only clue that Hébert was familiar with and intended to utilize Freud's theories. As stated above, Freud's initial research painted a disturbing picture of prepubescent children, like *soeur* Julie, as victims of adult sexual molestation. He believed that hysteric patients had their libido prematurely awakened and had neurotic manifestations that had to be traced back to their initial childhood sexual shock. But Freud also speculated that abused children suffered both from the initial distress of the rape and from their own response to the molestation. In particular, he believed that the children found the forced sexual intercourse pleasurable before guiltily repressing those emotions.

Hébert remains true to Freud's theories. As the novel progresses and the sexual scenes between *soeur* Julie and her father increase in number, they become clouded in ambiguity. We learn that the father repeats the horrifying deflowerment of the young daughter at the Sabbat and that *soeur* Julie begins to "désirer" and "aimer" these erotic encounters with her father. Hébert writes

> Derrière la cloison, les cris de la fille, le rire du père. Ce qu'ils font ensemble, tous les deux couchés sur la paillasse. Ce que le père n'obtient que par la force. Ce que la fille apprend à défendre, puis à désirer, à aimer, aux portes de la mort.[296]

Hébert demonstrates that the seemingly traumatic rape scenes between father and daughter have evolved into a carnal craving and a blurry rendition of forced sexual relations. Using Freud's theories, she reveals that the initial distress caused by the forced intercourse has been replaced by the protagonist's enjoyment of her infantile sexuality.

By 1905, Freud reversed his belief that hysterics were seduced by their fathers and rejected his own theory of hysteria's origins in sexual trauma. Unable to accept the possibility of so many perverse fathers, he modified his theories and developed the idea that hysteria was caused by a conflict in the patient's psyche. Fantasy, according to Freud, played a central role in the psychogenesis of hysteria. A presexual shock did not. Sexuality was still at the center of the new theory, but it was now something that had been imagined rather than actually undergone. It was at this point that Freud constructed one of the founding principles of psychoanalysis, the

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[296] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 110.

Oedipus complex. According to this complex, seduction by the father was a universal fantasy that all children experienced in normal childhood development. Cancelling the image of childhood innocence, he argued that children possessed a polymorphous perverse sexuality. By reversing the seduction scene and arguing that seduction was a result of the child's perverse desires, the parent became a passive object in the child's own sexual fantasies. In Freud's mind, fathers were not perverse; it was simply that the female children fantasized about seduction by their father.[297]

In Hébert's novel *soeur* Julie represses her sexual trauma and desires when she chooses to live in the convent. When she decides to adopt the self-denying and austere lifestyle of a nun, she endeavors to ignore all memories of sexual pleasure. As I will demonstrate in the next section of this chapter, *soeur* Julie's forced repression involves not only repressing her relationship with her father but also her sexual desires for her brother, Joseph.

As she relives the past scenarios of her life, however, *soeur* Julie encounters memories that are both unknown and unacknowledged in her conscious mind. Through these memories, *soeur* Julie rediscovers her sexuality and reconstitutes sets of characteristics that help to define her

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[297] When Hébert creates soeur Julie's character, she demonstrates both Freud's initial theory and the evolution of his beliefs. As I will demonstrate in the next section of this chapter, she creates soeur Julie the witch to refute the Oedipus complex.

present identity. Because *soeur* Julie is eventually able to experience two conflicting lives – her life in the convent and her life with her parents – she begins to question her own identity. She begins to realize that she is more complex than she once seemed. She possesses multiple individualities.

The fourth and final clue that Hébert meant to construct *soeur* Julie's character using hysteria as a model lies in the protagonist's relationship with Dr. Painchaud. When Dr. Painchaud examines *soeur* Julie, he refers explicitly to "le mal des cloîtres" and believes that curing *soeur* Julie will require extreme measures. He states that

> Il faut l'empêcher de nuire, la rendre impuissante, lui fermer ses sales yeux jaunes, le temps d'une bonne anesthésie, être le maître absolu de sa vie et de sa mort, lui ouvrir le ventre et le recoudre à volonté, jeter aux ordures tout ce bataclan obscène (ovaires et matrice) qui ne peut servir à rien.[298]

Dr. Painchaud reveals that he wants to discard *soeur* Julie's reproductive organs because this "junk" serves no purpose. Such a diagnosis is reminiscent of medical reactions to hysteria during the Victorian age when treatment methods became increasingly violent and included both

[298] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 72.

ovariectomies and clitoral cauterization in cases of intractable hysteria.[299] Hébert thus fashions Dr. Painchaud's phallocentric methods of treatment to reflect the accepted medical handling of hysteria.

Dr. Painchaud's reaction to *soeur* Julie also reinforces the protagonist's multiple individualities. Since she is both a hysteric and a nun, *soeur* Julie poses a quandary for male medical knowledge. As a hysteric patient, she enters into a medical discourse that has always been etymologically linked with women and the feminine. As a female celibate nun, *soeur* Julie cannot be a mother and wife. She is immediately suspicious, she does not fit the mold, and she cannot be prescribed the "marriage cure." Since she is not supposed to become pregnant, her reproductive organs, according to the male doctors, are a null prop prone to hysteric symptoms and should be discarded.

As we have seen, Hébert goes to great lengths to construct a hysteric character using Freud's theories on hysteria. *Soeur* Julie's experiences in the convent seem to correspond perfectly with Freud's definition of hysteria and she appears to be the quintessential hysteric patient who suffers from attacks of the disease. But before we jump to conclusions, we must examine *soeur* Julie's witch-like qualities. As we will see, even though Hébert

[299] Among others, the gynecologist Alfred Hegar (1830-1914) performed ovariectomies, and the neurologist Nikolaus Friedreich (1825-1882) cauterized clitorises.

adopted many of Freud's theories on hysteria, she obscures her protagonist's true identity by bestowing her with witch-like qualities that are diametrically opposed to her identity as a hysteric. To understand why *soeur* Julie is not merely hysteric, we must now turn to soeur Julie the witch.

Soeur Julie the Witch

Hébert's bibliography on witchcraft at the end of *Les Enfants du sabbat* is proof that she meant to imbue *soeur* Julie with witch-like qualities. Perhaps Hébert included this bibliography because she felt the need to convince her readers that she had created a witch-like character that abided by historical accounts. In the bibliography, Hébert cites seven texts that she consulted, but her knowledge on witchcraft was more extensive.[300] In addition to some of the texts mentioned in the bibliography, Hébert's personal library, which she donated to the Université de Sherbrooke, includes both fictional and non-fictional works on witchcraft such as Aldous Huxley's *Les diables de Loudun* (1952), Françoise Mallet-Joris's *Trois âges de la nuit* (1966), and François Ribadeau Dumas's *Dossiers secrets de la sorcellerie et de la magie noire* (1971).[301] Furthermore, while she did not donate a copy of *La Possession de Loudun* (1952) or cite it in her bibliography, the manifestation of some of *soeur* Julie's witch symptoms are

[300]In his chapter on *Les Enfants du sabbat*, Delbert Russell provides a good overview of the significance of the texts on witchcraft that Anne Hébert included in her bibliography at the end of the novel. [Delbert Russell, "Saints and Demons: *Les Enfants du sabbat,*" *Anne Hébert* (Boston: Twayne, 1983) 91-4.]

[301]Hébert's personal library, now available at the Centre Anne Hébert, also includes two copies of Robert-Lionel Séguin's *La sorcellerie au Québec du XVIIe au XIXe siècle*, Michelet's *La sorcière*, Justine Glass's *La sorcellerie*, and Julio Caro Baroja's *Les sorcières et leur monde*. These are all cited in the bibliography at the end of *Les Enfants du sabbat*.

surprisingly similar to those of Michel de Certeau's descriptions of Jean des Anges.[302]

Like with the hints of hysteria, Hébert disperses details of *soeur* Julie's witch identity little by little. As readers, we are forced to glean these defining characteristics from the text and piece them together. When we fit all of the pieces of *soeur* Julie's identity puzzle together, we realize that Hébert meant to imbue her protagonist with witch-like qualities and to write against Freud's theories on hysteria. As we will see, Hébert suggests that hysteria and witchcraft are irreconcilable.

To be cured of hysteric symptoms, Freud believed that his patients had to relive repressed emotions while undergoing psychoanalytic treatments. The nuns, however, do not allow *soeur* Julie to undergo a formal psychoanalytic treatment plan and there is no overt mention of psychoanalysis in Hébert's novel. This lack of treatment could perhaps be attributed to her location. In the *Hysteria Diagnosis in Nineteenth-Century France*, Jan Goldstein highlights the conflict that existed between the church and the practitioners of psychiatry. Like Michelet, she points out that the

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[302] In the Loudun case, when the devils departed from Jeanne des Anges body, the names Joseph and Maria appeared inscribed on her left arm. [De Certeau 310.] In Hébert's novel, the letter J appears on each of soeur Julie's hands. Hébert writes "Sur le dessus de ses mains, écarlates et très nets, deux J majuscules … L'initiale sacrée … inscrite sur chacune des mains de sœur Julie?" [Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 97.] The similarity of these two occurrences leads me to believe that Hébert was familiar with the Loudon case and was purposely reproducing it in her novel.

clergy were the traditional healers of the soul, and that doctors were their natural rivals.[303] In *Les Enfants du sabbat*, clergy members constantly encourage *soeur* Julie to confess her sins. But *soeur* Julie never reveals her sexual desires.[304] And as we have seen, the doctors who examine the protagonist focus more on her body than on her mental status.

Even if *soeur* Julie never has a formal psychoanalytic treatment, Hébert's descriptions reveal that her protagonist undergoes self-induced sessions that allow her to relive important past memories.[305] According to Freud, *soeur* Julie should be able to confront her damaging and repressed subversive memories in these psychoanalytic treatments and rid herself of hysteric symptoms.[306] Her inability to do away with the detriments of past

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[303] Michelet writes "La médicine, surtout, c'est le vrai satanisme, une révolte contre la maladie, le fléau mérité de Dieu. Manifeste péché d'arrêter l'âme en chemin vers le ciel, de la replonger dans la vie!" [Michelet, *La Sorcière* 284.]

[304] Mère Marie-Clotilde tells sœur Julie "Votre silence est plus dur qu'un mur, ma sœur. Comment voulez-vous que je vous aide? Vous refusez tous secours. ... Vous devriez vous confesser, le plus tôt possible ma fille. Peut-être avec la grâce de Dieu, M. l'aumônier pourra-t-il vous délivrer de votre secret ?" [Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 20.]

[305] In *Studies in Hysteria*, Breuer confirms that it is possible to undergo a self-induced psychoanalytic session. He suggests that some patients can naturally enter into a state of auto-hypnosis, describes this phenomenon as a repetitive process, and confirms that "Once this has happened, the hypnosis-like state will repeat itself again and again in these same circumstances, and in the place of the two normal psychical states the individual has three: waking, sleeping, and hypnoid, as we have often observed in cases where deep artificial hypnosis has been frequently repeated." [Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria* 220.] In fact, soeur Julie is reminiscent of Anna O., Breuer's patient who daydreamed through a form of self-hypnosis. To read her case history, see *Studies in Hysteria.*

[306] In *Studies in Hysteria*, Freud and Breuer explain: "For we found, at first to our great surprise, that the individual hysterical symptoms disappeared immediately and did not recur if we succeeded in wakening the memory of the precipitating event with complete clarity, arousing with it the accompanying affect, and if the patient then depicted the event in the greatest possible detail and put words to the affect." [Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria* 10.]

memories is Hébert's first indication that *soeur* Julie is more than a mere hysteric patient. As a witch, sœur Julie escapes Freud.

In *La Jeune Née* (1975), Cixous and Clément compare the witch and the hysteric. They write that women like *soeur* Julie caused the very foundations of psychoanalysis to quiver. In fact, Clément seems to be describing the protagonist when she writes

> En jeu, toute l'évaluation de la psychanalyse comme fonction thérapeutique…l'hystérique réputée incurable, prend parfois, et de plus en plus, la figure d'une héroïne résistante: celle que le traitement psychanalytique ne pourra jamais *réduire*. Celle qui a suscité la passion de Freud par le spectacle de la féminité en crise, et celle qui, seule, a su lui échapper.[307]

Instead of finding a cure for her hysteric symptoms, *soeur* Julie's psychoanalytic treatments are a means for her to rediscover a repressed facet of her identity. When *soeur* Julie undergoes her treatments, she exhumes her buried powers, revisits her childhood, and reappropriates a portion of her identity.

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[307] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La Jeune née* (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1975) 21.

Soeur Julie's acceptance and acknowledgement of her own sexual desires are the first clue that Hébert meant for her protagonist to resemble a witch. *Soeur* Julie burns with passion for her brother and tries to seduce him at many points in the novel. At one point, she speaks directly to her brother as he nods off

> Mon cher petit garçon, mon doux petit Jésus! Rassure-toi. Je suis ta sœur de lait, de lit, et de miséricorde. Dors en paix ! Je ne fais qu'effleurer (pour ton plus grand bien et pour le mien), du bout des doigts et des lèvres, toute ta peau, depuis la racine de tes cheveux jusqu'aux ongles de tes pieds.[308]

Sœur Julie tries to entice her brother while he is in this state partway between sleeping and waking, but he refuses to succumb to her sexual longings.

Because *soeur* Julie admits candidly that she wants to sleep with Joseph for "her own good," she acknowledges her carnal craving for her brother. According to Freud, however, hysterics shunned sexuality and repressed their sexual desires out of feelings of disgust and guilt. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud explains that

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[308] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 153.

> Disgust seems to be one of the forces which have led to a restriction of the sexual aim. These forces do not as a rule extend to the genitals themselves. But there is no doubt that the genitals of the opposite sex can in themselves be an object of disgust and that such an attitude is one of the characteristics of all hysterics, and especially of hysterical women.[309]

Hébert's witch-like character does not try to deny her own sexual desires and she does not see her brother's genitals as an object of disgust. She tries to repress her desires when she attempts to live in the convent, but prior to her entrance into the religious order, she caresses, rocks, and sleeps as close to her brother as possible. Moreover, even while she is in the convent, *soeur* Julie realizes that she longs to protect and possess her brother. In one instance, she admits that she loves her brother more than God and that she wants to caress his naked body.[310] Because she possesses such intense sexual agency, *soeur* Julie contrasts sharply with Freud's definition of hysteria.

Soeur Julie's sexual relationships in the novel are also important because Hébert fashions her protagonist's sexuality to refute one of the

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[309] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* 18.

[310] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 24.

founding principles of psychoanalysis, Freud's Oedipus complex. The Oedipus complex, according to psychoanalytic theory, is a universal phenomenon in childhood development in which children try to seduce the parent of the opposite sex and eliminate the parent of the same sex. Children, according to Freud, had to resolve these tensions in their relationships with their parents in order to properly perform their required gender roles. Boys, he claimed, gave up their yearnings for their mothers because they feared castration. Girls developed penis envy and learned that they would eventually find fulfillment in their roles as wives and mothers. In both cases, resolution required that the children identify with the parent of the same sex and renounce their longings for the parent of the opposite sex.

In *Les Enfants du sabbat*, Hébert seems to mock Freud's belief. Instead of renouncing her desires for her father and associating with her mother, *soeur* Julie replaces Philomène and forms a sexual relationship with her father. *Soeur* Julie proclaims

> Cher Satan, mon père et mon époux. (Ses grandes eaux viriles en moi, son rire comme la voix des grosses cloches.) Enseigne-moi tout ! La perversité."[311]

[311] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 110.

Soeur Julie believes that she is both daughter and wife of Adélard and contends that she has a lot to learn from her lover. Hébert repeats this incestuous identity many times in the novel and allows her protagonist to contend that she is "...l'égale de ma mère et l'épouse de mon père."[312] *Soeur* Julie even adds that she will replace her mother, affirming that "Bientôt deux sorcières dans la maison, ce sera trop. La plus vieille doit disparaître."[313] Through such declarations, Hébert seems to suggest that her protagonist has successfully completed the Oedipus complex. Rather than follow Freud's theory by renouncing her perverse desires for her father, *soeur* Julie declares herself equal to her mother and announces that she will replace her.

Because Hébert focuses so much attention on this father / daughter relationship and utilizes terms that evoke Freud's theory, we can interpret her descriptions as a calculated and purposeful attack on Freud's Oedipus complex. With *soeur* Julie, Hébert deliberately creates a character that shatters Freud's system of normal identity development. And by calling the validity of the Oedipus complex into question, Hébert casts doubt on the very foundations of Freud's theories.

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[312] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 67.

[313] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 110.

Another clue that *soeur* Julie is not a hysteric lies in *soeur* Julie's partiality to unclean environments. In *La Jeune Née*, Clément points out that the witch lives and thrives in a dirty environment. The hysteric, by contrast, cannot tolerate filth. Clément describes the two and writes that the witch

> …se mêle au sale, elle n'a pas la phobie du propre, du nettoyage ménager auquel sont souvent soumises les hystériques; elle manie la crasse, manipule les déchets, enterre les placentas, fait brûler les coiffes des enfants nouveaux-nés pour qu'elles portent bonheur.[314]

This difference between a clean and hysteric surrounding and a dirty and witch-like environment is evident in *Les Enfants du sabbat.* A la montagne de B…, the cabin is dirty, the children run wild in the forest, and strong smells permeate the air. *Soeur* Julie and Joseph are "…jamais peignés, pleins de poux et tout crottés."[315] Even the seemingly hygienic practices on the mountain are polluted. Philomène washes, but she uses a "…quantité de seaux d'eau et de boue."[316] And Julie and Joseph do not even use muddy

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[314] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La Jeune née* 72.

[315] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 8.

[316] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 29.

water to bathe; they clean each other with their own saliva in a process that is both animalistic and unsanitary.[317]

In the convent, however, where sœur Julie has hysteric symptoms, she is constantly in the act of cleaning. In fact, the nuns equate cleanliness with happiness. The wash house's motto, where *soeur* Julie engages in the majority of her cleaning efforts, is "Pour une heure de travail, une éternité de Bonheur."[318]

Soeur Julie participates in her religious sisters' efforts to scour and scrub the convent so that it might become a sanitary and uncontaminated place of worship, but she is not troubled by dirt. Sœur Gemma, more than *soeur* Julie, is terrified of the unhygienic and suffers when mère Marie-Clothilde assigns her with kitchen duty. Hébert writes that the nun is "...agressée par tout ce qui salit, graisse, gicle, coule, écorche, coupe et brûle."[319] As her "mains blêmes...pataugent dans la viande et le sang, les abats, les écailles de poisson, les plumes de poulet,"[320] the same sort of kitchen wastes that Clément claims that the witch uses to make potions, sœur

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[317] Hébert writes that the siblings "... se barbouillent de mûres, visages, bras et jambes, se lèchent mutuellement dans la chaleur moite des fardoches à midi." [Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 59.]

[318] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 57.

[319] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 47.

[320] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 48.

Gemma vomits. In fact, Clément seems to be describing sœur Gemma and *soeur* Julie when she writes that hysterics

> ...ont des dégouts devant les verres d'eau, les assiettes pleins de viande et de graisse refroidie, les crachoirs: tout ce qui est du côté du déchet culinaire, du déchet du corps. Tout ce dont, avec bonheur, la sorcière fera ses charmes et ses philtres.[321]

Sœur Julie is happy in the kitchen, manipulating kitchen wastes.[322] As a witch, she thrives in dirty environments.

Throughout the novel, Hébert demonstrates that *soeur* Julie struggles to fit into her assigned role at the convent and relishes the freedom that life as a witch offers her. Clément seems to describe *soeur* Julie's witch character traits when she writes that

> Quand la sorcière est encore libre, au Sabbat, dans la forêt, elle est toute sensibilité dehors, toute peau ouverte, naturelle, animale, odorante et délicieusement malpropre; quand elle est prise, quand la scène de l'inquisition forme autour d'elle comme plus tard la scène de la médecine autour de l'hystérique,

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[321] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La Jeune née* 72.

[322] Hébert writes that soeur Julie "écarte soeur Gemma de la table. Elle taille et tranche la pièce de viande. Ses gestes sont sûrs et précis, légers et joyeux." [Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 48.]

> elle a des points d'anesthésie, elle vomit. Elle est devenue hystérique.[323]

Soeur Julie, like the witch in Clément's description, only suffers from hysteric symptoms when she is forced to adopt the austere lifestyle required of the convent. When she lives in the dirty and free world of the mountain, she is much happier.

Hébert stresses the opposition between the clean nunnery and the dirty world of the witch throughout the novel, suggesting that the two are distinct and separate worlds. And she suggests that *soeur* Julie fits into the world on the mountain more than life in the convent. When mère Marie-Clothilde refuses to allow *soeur* Julie to clean her nightgown, for example, it does not bother the witch. She states "Plus je macère dans ma crasse, plus je m'échappe facilement du couvent, plus je mérite des compliments ailleurs et plus je suis contente et joyeuse dans un autre monde."[324] With this quote, Hébert suggests that *soeur* Julie is happy in the world of witchcraft and that she is out of place in the ascetic atmosphere demanded of the convent. Moreover, Hébert reveals that *soeur* Julie enjoys the "consolation magique" that life on the mountain brings and that the witch experiences a feeling of

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[323] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La Jeune née* 78.

[324] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 57.

abandonment when she leaves that life and is forced back into the nunnery.[325] In one instance, *soeur* Julie even compares her adjustment to life on the mountain to that of a purring cat who settles in next to a cozy fire.[326] This simile alone is proof of the satisfaction and happiness that *soeur* Julie feels when she is participating in her life as a witch on the mountain.

[325] Hébert writes that when sœur Julie leaves the mountain she feels "une impression d'abandon très grande. … Et soeur Julie aussi est affamée de cela qui est caché dans la montagne. Plus que de toute sa vie au couvent." [Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 12.]

[326] Soeur Julie claims "Toute frontière abolie, voici que je retrouve mon enfance. Aucune résistance. Je m'ajuste à sa chair et à ses os. Je me réchauffe à la source de ma vie perdue, pareille à une chatte ronronnante s'installant près du feu." [Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 38.]

Soeur Julie the Witch and the Hysteric

As we have seen, Freud's theories on hysteria are a paradigm that Hébert utilizes to create a hysteric-like character and then writes against to create a witch-like character. *Soeur* Julie the witch, operates outside of Freud's system, calls his theories into question, and overturns his most important principles. We can, therefore, interpret Hébert's novel as an attack against Freud's association of the witch and the hysteric.

Furthermore, since she is an exception to the Oedipus complex, *soeur* Julie shatters Freud's ideal for normal childhood development. She does not proceed along what Freud contended to be normal identity parameters, demonstrates that his fixed identity strictures cannot explain her development, and forces us to commence a new dialogue on identity formation. With *soeur* Julie, Hébert creates a character who is resistant – not only to typically civilized society – but also to one of the most powerful theories for understanding the human psyche – psychoanalysis.

Even at the end of the novel, we are not sure how to define *soeur* Julie. Is she really a witch? Or do all of her seemingly supernatural actions have realistic explanations? When we close Hébert's novel, we experience the sort of feeling of unrest that characterizes the fantastic. We are confused

precisely because *soeur* Julie's identity remains a mystery. This, however, was perhaps Hébert's intention.

Instead of forcing her witch protagonist to adopt identity labels, Hébert creates a character that does not completely fit any predetermined identity. Witch and hysteric are the two main identities that emerge for *soeur* Julie, but Hébert constructs *soeur* Julie's identity like a pendulum. By allowing her protagonist's identity to swing back and forth between the two, Hébert suggests that her protagonist's identity is in a constant state of flux.

This decision to allow *soeur* Julie's identity to vacillate during the novel is a powerful means of forcing readers to consider the strength that lies in the ability to exist in an indeterminate, undefined state. Through *soeur* Julie's chameleon-like qualities, Hébert allows us to realize that identity is not a closed entity. Depending on the chapter, we may think that *soeur* Julie is both a witch *and* a hysteric, that she is either witch *or* hysteric, or that she is neither witch *nor* hysteric. As Gabriele Poulin eloquently states, *soeur* Julie de la Trinité, like her name indicates, seems to exist as a new Trinity that includes three divergent identities.[327] And as Lori Saint-Martin points out, witches like sœur Julie "...permet[tent] ainsi de réunir et de transcender des stéréotypes opposes (Marie et Eve, la Vierge et la pécheresse) et de

[327] Gabriele Poulin, "La Nouvelle Héloïse Québécois : Une Lecture des *Enfants du sabbat*," *Relations* 36.413 (1976): 92.

donner naissance a de nouveaux types de femmes plus incarnes et plus complets."[328] Because *soeur* Julie challenges normal identity parameters, we realize that identity can be multifaceted, unstable, and surprising.

As a literary figure, *soeur* Julie forces us to ask many important questions. What if we, like *soeur* Julie, have repressed facets of our identities that we need to uncover? What if we find these memories and, instead of rejecting them, decide to embrace them like *soeur* Julie? Why do we have to define ourselves according to one identity? Why can we not embrace two seemingly contradictory identities?

Freud believed that the witch and the hysteric were equivalent. Clément believed that the witch and the hysteric were two distinct identities and lambasted Freud's desire to associate the two.[329] Perhaps Hébert intends to operate between the two. Perhaps she believes that we are all, like *soeur* Julie, both a little bit witch and a little bit hysteric. Like Hébert suggested in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, perhaps the witch is really just a latent portion of us all.

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[328] Saint-Martin 182.

[329] Clément wrote that the association between the hysteric and the witch was a "compromis irréalisible" and a "synthèse incompatible." [Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La Jeune née* 19.]

Chapter 5
Objectification and Witchcraft

Reading the Witch Through Existentialism

As we have seen in previous chapters, part of our identity formation is affected by our relationships with other people. Others have, to varying extents, the power to influence who we are and what we become. Others may, as in the case of *soeur* Julie, leave us with indelible childhood memories that continue to haunt us into our adult years. They may, like with Tituba and Antonia, start vicious rumors about us that cause our fellow neighbors to judge us unfairly. Or they might, like was so often the case in trials of witchcraft, blame us for their own misfortunes and shortcomings.

In spite of their supposedly supernatural powers, witches were not immune to the influence of other people. In fact, it was perhaps the contrary. As I have already pointed out, many historians have argued that witches took the blame for society's misfortunes. They contend that witches were the scapegoats of society who were massacred when things were not optimal. Perhaps there was a poor harvest or perhaps a child or prize cow fell ill. If so, there was surely a witch who had used her evil powers to cast a spell on the poor, innocent victim. And when the townspeople found a

woman to sacrifice for their misfortunes, they labeled her as a witch. They assigned her an identity; she became a victim of what other people believed.

Tituba, Antonia, and *soeur* Julie are all victims of their relationships with other people. They are influenced and determined to some extent by factors that remain out of their control. Sartre's witches, by contrast, are not determined by past, unconscious memories or by fates that are elusive. But Sartre's witches do have to contend with what other members of the Salem society think of them. As we will see, witches are a means for Sartre to demonstrate his own theories concerning identity formation.

Like Hébert, Condé, and Vassalli, Sartre believes that other people participate in our identity formation. And in his philosophical treatise, *L'Etre et le néant* (1943), Sartre describes the role that others play in our lives in great detail. If we examine Sartre's theories, we realize that they substantially elucidate the quandary posed by witch characters. In particular, Sartre outlines several different tactics in *L'Etre et le néant* that we employ to try and take control of our own identity formations. As I will demonstrate, many of the tactics that he so meticulously delineates are prevalent in the conflicts at hand.

One of the most important components of Sartre's theory developed in *L'Etre et le néant* is that we, as human beings, are constantly fighting against

others to establish our identities. In fact, according to Sartre, our primary experience of the Other is as cause of our objectification and the loss of our being. The Other, to use Sartre's terms, can "steal" our existences. By this, Sartre means that we lose both our world and part of our grasp of our selves when we realize that the Other is an independent being and the source of his own world who can form his own interpretation of us. We cannot force the Other to form an image of us that we find flattering, and we cannot control how he chooses to view us. But through our interactions with the Other, we *can* see ourselves in a way that we could never conceive of alone. Since we do not contemplate ourselves as we might contemplate an object, from some external point of view, we rely on the other to send us an image of the identity that we are projecting to the world. We need the Other because without him, we are only aware of ourselves from the inside. With the Other, we can see *ourselves* because the Other sees *us*. Sartre writes that Other people hold the keys to who we really are or "the secret" of our being. He writes "autrui me regarde et, comme tel, il détient le secret de mon être, il sait ce que je suis; ainsi le sens profond de mon être est hors de moi, emprisonné dans une absence ; autrui à barre sur moi."[330] Sartre believes

[330] Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943) 403.

that we must use the vison that the Other has of us to form a more complete grasp of our identity.

Sartre writes that this process of interacting with others both fascinates us and fills us with horror. For when we allow the Other the power to determine part of our identity, he can become a threatening presence in our world. Like a ship that capsizes in the water and forces those aboard to slide into and acknowledge the cold, dark sea, we have to sink into and must admit the existence of the Other's world.[331] This makes us feel vulnerable and afraid. It makes us realize that we are no longer in control of the situation and it makes us want to recover the freedom over our identities that we lost when we accepted the Other's view of us.

Sartre writes that the appearance of the Other makes us realize that we are no longer "master of the situation" because the situation is *for the Other.*[332] According to Sartre, we try to combat this feeling of helplessness by trying to steal the Other's freedom, for it is only by their freedom that they are able to constitute an identity for us that is beyond our reach.[333] One

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[331] Sartre writes the existence of the Other "...correspond...à un glissement figé de tout l'univers, à une décentration du monde qui mine par en dessous la centralisation que j'opère dans le même temps." [Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 295.]

[332] Sartre writes that "...l'apparition de l'autre fait apparaître dans la situation un aspect que je n'ai pas voulu, dont je ne suis pas maître et qui m'échappe par principe, puisqu'il est *pour l'autre.*" [Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 304-5.]

[333] Sartre explains that the Other possesses an infinite freedom that limits and fixes our possibilities. He writes that "...la mort de mes possibilités me fait éprouver la liberté d'autrui." [Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant*

of the easiest ways of achieving this goal, Sartre claims, is by objectifying the Other; if we can relate to the other person only as an object in our world, we can retain our own subjectivity, our freedom, and the power to control our own existences. [334] As Sartre puts it, if we can "retourner sur autrui pour lui conférer à mon tour l'objectité…l'objectité d'autrui est destructrice de mon objectivité pour autrui."[335]

When we examine twentieth-century literary representations of witchcraft, we realize that the kind of objectification that Sartre describes in *L'Etre et le néant* goes hand-in-hand with witchcraft accusations. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, those who accused cantankerous women of practicing magic likely found it easier to watch their burning bodies if they had dehumanized and objectified them. This holds true for the twentieth-century literary representations as well. In particular, in each text, those who accuse the witches of witchcraft only do so after they objectify the witches. As we will see, this objectification occurs on many different

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310.] He contends that in order to be the foundation of our own selves, we have to assimilate the Other's freedom, writing that "mon projet de récupération de moi est fondamentalement projet de résorption de l'autre." [Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 405.]

[334] Sartre contends that we are, at the very root of our being, engaged in a project of assimilating and making an object of the Other. He states "…je suis à la racine même de mon être, pro-jet d'objectivation ou d'assimilation d'autrui." [Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 403.]

[335] Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 403.

levels and those who objectify employ many of the attitudes that Sartre describes in *L'Etre et le néant*.[336]

One of the first methods of objectification that is prevalent in witchcraft accusations involves the *gaze*. In *L'Etre et le néant*, Sartre explains that, in order for the Other to objectify us, we have to encounter his gaze. If we do not see the Other, we do not have to worry about what type of identity he is ascribing to us. We continue along the paths of our lives and believe that we are the sole subjects and the only beings that have any influence over our identities. But then we see the Other and the Other sees us. Eyes, according to Sartre, are a powerful mechanism that the Other can use to control and objectify us. For when we encounter the Other, we either dominate him with our look and thereby take away his freedom by objectifying him, or we submit to his look and allow our own freedom to be taken away.

Eyes and the gaze played an important role in witchcraft accusations. In the *Malleus*, Sprenger and Kramer taught that witches could bewitch men and animals with a mere look.[337] They argued that witches could use their "angry and evil gaze," to cause children to fall sick and prevent them from

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[336]In *L'Etre et le néant*, Sartre discusses several different tactics that we employ to recover our identities and steal the Other's freedom. He divides his account of human relations into two primary attitudes, the first including love and masochism, and the second including indifference, sexual desire, sadism, and hate.

[337]Sprenger and Kramer 99.

nourishing themselves, kill livestock, or even cause pregnant women to miscarry their developing fetuses. In the *Malleus*, they tell one specific story of what happened to a man who turned to look at a witch after she had verbally threatened him. As long as the man kept his back to the witch, he was fine, but when "...he looked over his shoulder to see [the witch] ... he was suddenly bewitched so that his mouth was stretched sideways as far as his ears in a horrible deformity and he could not draw it back..."[338] Witches' eyes were so powerful that Sprenger and Kramer even compared witches and their eyes to the basilik, the legendary king of the serpents who could cause death with one glance.[339]

The twentieth-century literary witches, as in Sprenger and Kramer's definition, have powerful and malevolent eyes. In *Les Enfants du sabbat*, the other nuns and doctors comment continually on *soeur* Julie's "yeux jaunes" which they believe to be a sure sign of her witch heritage and on her power to use the "mauvais oeil" to cause harm.[340] In *La Chimera*, the townspeople believe that Antonia can use her eyes to control the weather, make children fall ill, and cause roofs to collapse, among other things. And in *Moi, Tituba sorcière noire de Salem*, Susanna Endicott and her friends

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[338] Sprenger and Kramer 223.

[339] Sprenger and Kramer 18.

[340] Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 92 and 170.

refer to Tituba's "yeux de sorcière" and her "regard à vous retourner le sang."[341]

Encountering these witches' eyes is a frightening experience for those who believe in witchcraft because they claim to fear the evil that might transpire. But avoiding the witch's gaze is also a means that they employ to objectify the witch. As Sartre explains, if we do not want to admit the Other's subjectivity, we can refuse to encounter the Other's gaze. This tactic allows us to refuse the Other's being and prevents the Other from objectifying us.[342] Condé provides an excellent illustration of this tactic in *Moi, Tituba sorcière noire de Salem*. In several scenes, Susanna Endicott and her friends objectify Tituba by refusing to look her in the eyes or even acknowledge her presence. Tituba complains

> On aurait dit que je n'étais pas là, debout, au seuil de la pièce. Elles parlaient de moi, mais en même temps, elles m'ignoraient. Elles me rayaient de la carte des humains. J'étais un non-être. Un invisible. Plus invisible que les invisibles, car eux au moins, détiennent un pouvoir que chacun redoute. Tituba,

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[341] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 45.

[342] Sartre reveals that this tactic allows the accusers to deny the subjectivity of the witches *and* allows them to refuse their own objectivity. He writes that "...ma liaison avec autrui-sujet doit pouvoir se ramener à ma possibilité permanente *d'être vu* par autrui. C'est dans et par la révélation de mon être-objet pour autrui que je dois pouvoir saisir la présence de son être-sujet." [Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 296.]

> Tituba n'avait plus de réalité que celle que voulaient bien lui concéder ces femmes.[343]

Susanna Endicott and her friends refuse Tituba's gaze and practice an attitude that Sartre labels as indifference toward others.[344] Rather than recognize her presence, the women act as if they are alone in the world and build their subjectivities upon the collapse of Tituba's. Instead of treating Tituba as another human being, Susanna Endicott objectifies the witch by, to use Tituba's words, "wiping her off of the human map." She treats Tituba like an inhuman object that she can manipulate and determine. She even associates Tituba with her other material belongings.[345]

Eyes and the gaze can also be used in a somewhat different way to objectify the Other; they often reveal that the Other has, like in Tituba's case, completely refused our subjectivity and is in the process of creating a new identity for us. In the twentieth-century texts, the witches realize the horrendous futures that await them when they encounter the cold stare of the

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[343] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 44.

[344] Sartre explains "...je peux, dans mon surgissement au monde, me choisir comme regardant le regard de l'autre et bâtir ma subjectivité sur l'effondrement de celle de l'autre. C'est cette attitude que nous nommerons *l'indifférence envers autrui.* Il s'agit alors d'une cécité vis-à-vis des autres." [Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 420.]

[345] Tituba is so enraged by Susanna Endicott's failure to recognize her that she states "Je suis la compagne de John Indien, mais vous ne m'avez pas achetée. Vous ne possédez aucun titre de propriété m'énumérant avec vos chaises, vos commodes, votre lit et vos édredons." [Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 61.]

Other. Through the gaze, they realize that the other characters are objectifying them and dehumanizing them and understand that they will suffer cruel and inhumane treatments. They also understand that the other characters are assigning identities for them. In *Les Sorcières de Salem*, Elisabeth reveals that she can read Abigail's mind through her piercing eyes. When she encounters Abigail's gaze, Elisabeth understands she will affect her identity by accusing her of witchcraft and labeling her as a witch. She explains "J'ai vu Abigail tout a l'heure et j'ai lu dans ses yeux: elle me fera pendre."[346] Likewise, when Tituba encounters Susanna Endicott and her friends, she complains that they assign her with a new identity. She states "Tituba devenait laide, grossière, inférieure parce qu'elles en avaient décidé ainsi."[347] For both of these witches, the experience of being seen through the Other's gaze is an important component of intersubjective relations that allows the Other to confer a part of their identities upon them.

Objectifying the bodies of witches is another method of refusing the subjectivity of the other. As I have demonstrated in previous chapters, in the twentieth-century texts, the witches are victims of harsh bodily treatments. Whether they are bound to their beds like *soeur* Julie before being poked and

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[346] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 86.

[347] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 44.

prodded with sharp needles while inquisitors search for the Devil's mark or brutally abused and raped like Antonia and Tituba, those who objectify the witches make them endure cruel and inhumane treatments. Condé's witch, for example, must suffer through a mock rape scene. Tituba describes the ordeal stating

> L'un des hommes se mit carrément à cheval sur moi et commença de me marteler le visage de ses poings, durs comme pierres. Un autre releva ma jupe et enfonça un bâton taillé en point dans la partie la plus sensible de mon corps en raillant : Prends, prends, c'est la bite de John Indien![348]

The first man mounts Tituba as if she were an animal while the second symbolically molests her. Both men objectify her body and beat her in a process that is dehumanizing and heartless.

The men who engage in this mock rape scene torture Tituba so that she will confess to witchcraft. Sprenger and Kramer believed that torture was a necessary part of witchcraft trials and encouraged its use. They argued that torture had to be used to extract a confession from the witch and maintained that the most extreme measures of violence were acceptable because the witch would "sooner be torn limb from limb than confess any of

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[348] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 144.

the truth."[349] In the third part of the *Malleus*, they even provide detailed instructions for those who are responsible for torturing the witches. They suggest that the witches should be naked during the extreme physical punishments and that the torturers should increase the intensity of their methods until they extract a confession. And they even propose that the torturers lie to witches – the torturers can promise the witch her life will be spared if she confess and then burn her after receiving her confession.[350]

One can hardly think of these naked, bound, and tortured women without thinking of another attitude that Sartre examines in *L'Etre et le néant*. The sadist, according to Sartre, treats the Other as an instrument and uses cruelty to objectify the Other's body. In the twentieth-century texts, the men who inflict physical pain on the witch characters, like the sadist, treat them as sexual objects while using cruelty to objectify their bodies. As in the scene with Condé's witch, the men who search Tituba make her strip totally naked before symbolically molesting her body. In Hébert's novel, Dr. Painchaud is obviously aroused by his encounter with *soeur* Julie's unclothed body. And Vassalli reveals that those who abused Antonia were venting their sexual tribulations and anguish.[351] They, according to Vassalli,

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[349] Sprenger and Kramer 223.
[350] Sprenger and Kramer 225-226.

[351] Vassalli, *La Chimera* 321.

were able to explore their own sexual frustrations on buxom, beautiful, and youthful women.

Examining the witches' naked bodies also allowed the men to further objectify the witches. They examined them as objects, claiming that they were supernatural beings that did not deserve to be treated as real, human subjects. Viewing the witches in this manner allowed the men to intellectually justify their cruel and inhumane manipulation of the females' bodies.

Hate is another tactic that we use on the Other to objectify him. When we hate someone, according to Sartre, we often seek to eliminate him so that he can no longer have an influence on our identity formation. We hate the Other and the power that he has over us and our ultimate goal is often to dominate and destroy him. Consequently, we pursue his death. In *Les Sorcières de Salem*, Abigail utilizes this strategy on Elisabeth. She objectifies Elisabeth through her hatred, believes that she can eliminate her, and tells John that she will soon replace his wife. Elisabeth understands what Abigail is trying to accomplish and tells her husband "Abigail a monté cette affaire parce qu'elle veut ma place."[352] She knows that Abigail will

[352] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 87.

accuse her of witchcraft and warns John that she will try to kill her so that she can take over her identity.

Abigail, for her part, never hides her intentions. She even tells John explicitly

> Ne crains rien, je n'essaierai pas de te tenter. Tu ne me toucheras pas avant que je sois Maîtresse Proctor. Ne t'inquiètes pas, je ferais tout moi-même. Tu garderas les mains pures.[353]

Accusing Elisabeth of witchcraft is a means for Abigail to express her hatred for the current Maîtresse Proctor. In addition to overtly avowing her desire to murder Elisabeth, Abigail reveals both her wish to replace Elisabeth and her failure in a potent scene at the Proctor house. When she finds the front door of their house open, she feels compelled to close its door. Before she shuts up what she believed would be her future house and future identity, she enters to find rats, cockroaches, half eaten gruel, and molded bread. The house's state of disrepair symbolizes the collapse of her plan to replace Elisabeth. As she looks upon her failed endeavor, she begins to cry. Mercy, one of the other characters who participates in the witchcraft accusations, comments on Abigail's reaction stating "Pauvre Abigail; tu voulais épouser

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[353] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 44.

le mari et faire pendre la femme. Eh bien, la femme est sauvée et c'est le mari qu'on pendra."[354]

Abigail uses witchcraft to objectify Elisabeth and create a new identity for her. But she also uses her hatred of Elisabeth to create a new identity for herself. As with all of the other cases of objectification, hatred allows Abigail to ignore Elisabeth's subjectivity and build her own identity upon the collapse of her rival's.

What we realize when we examine these various tactics is that accusing others of witchcraft is partly about creating a new identity for oneself. In *L'Etre et le néant*, Sartre explains that we can spend a large majority of our lives trying to objectify and dominate the Other using tactics like the ones examined above. What we want, he claims, is to regain complete control of ourselves. We want to have complete control over our identity formation. We can do this, however, only so far as we succeed in objectifying the Other.

Those women who refused to encounter Tituba's gaze could view themselves as superior to her. They could act like they did not care about what Tituba thought of them which allowed them the freedom to determine their own identities. The sadistic men who objectified the witches' bodies

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[354] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 103.

were able to live out fantasies of repressed sexualities. They were able to dominate the "witch" in a way that made them experience their own unbridled subjectivities. They felt that they were the sole subjects in the encounter, and they relished in their newfound power and identities. Abigail wanted to become John's wife and was willing to accuse Elisabeth of witchcraft so that the Salem officials might murder her. She wanted to replace Elisabeth and take over her identity. She wanted to become Maîtresse Proctor.

In each of the cases, those who accused others of witchcraft were objectifying the "witch" in an attempt to affirm their own desired identities. They needed to objectify the witches because if they did, they did not have to encounter what they really were: racists, torturers, and liars. What they really were doing, however, was practicing the attitudes that Sartre labels as indifference, sadism, and hatred of others.

In *L'Etre et le néant*, Sartre joins these three tactics with three other tactics: love, masochism, and sexual desire. In the remainder of this chapter, I will turn to John Proctor's character development in *Les Sorcières de Salem* to demonstrate several of these attitudes and show how we can use these attitudes to objectify the Other. The Salem society, for Sartre, is a playground for examining human interactions and the various ways of being

in the world and John Proctor is a prime example of someone struggling to discover his identity.

John and Abigail: Submission and Masochism

While he does not accuse other women of witchcraft to try and create a new identity for himself, Sartre's main character, John Proctor, struggles to define himself and create meaning in his life. John leads us on a voyage of self-discovery that involves objectifying other characters to try and affirm his own subjectivity, experiencing the shame associated with being seen by the Other, and ultimately concluding that he is condemned to be free and cannot put the responsibility of forming his identity on anyone but himself.

John's two primary and defining relationships in *Les Sorcières de Salem* are with his wife, Elisabeth, and with his mistress, Abigail. These relationships are antithetic and, when analyzed, demonstrate the varying attitudes that John employs to try and take control of his own identity. If we begin by analyzing the way in which John interacts with Abigail, we realize that he is trying, with his mistress, to use sadism to affirm his own subjectivity. Like in the other twentieth-century texts, Sartre's "witch" endeavors to regain control over his own identity by objectifying Abigail and her body. But John also resorts to other tactics to try to affirm his

subjectivity. In particular, Sartre focuses on and comments extensively on the *caress* and its effects in six different scenes in *Les Sorcières de Salem*. In each scene, he reveals that, for John, the caress is an inebriating experience.

Sartre explains the importance of the caress in *L'Etre et le néant*. According to Sartre, when another person caresses us, it allows us to experience our own bodies. The caress ignites our sensory receptors and, to use Sartre's terms, our flesh comes alive beneath the Other's fingers.[355] We feel the Other's hands on us, but we also feel our own flesh. In *Les Sorcières de Salem*, Sartre writes that when Abigail caresses John's chest, he closes his eyes, groans, and breathes heavily.[356] Using Sartre's theories, we can conclude that John enjoys Abigail's carnal touch, but that what he also really loves is the feeling of his own flesh; Abigail's caress is a means for him to feel his own subjectivity.

At the beginning of the play, John's relationship with Abigail is a tactic that he employs to allow for the revelation of his own body. He allows her to caress him and actively desires her because it allows him to experience his own subjectivity. Abigail, for her part, understands the

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[355] Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 430.

[356] Sartre writes that Abigail "...ouvre la chemise de Proctor et lui caresse la poitrine. Il grogne et souffle. Elle parle pendant qu'il ferme les yeux." [Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 9.]

power of the caress and utilizes it to arouse John's desire for her. Whenever Abigail has the opportunity to touch John in a sensual manner or to arouse his desire, she does. She even warns Elisabeth that she needs to learn to caress her husband if she does not want him to leave her.[357] By this, Abigail means that Elisabeth needs to learn to allow her husband to assert his subjectivity.

Abigail also allows John to experience his subjectivity by completely objectifying her body. With Abigail, John acts like a sadist, revealing a violence that is both terrifying and authoritarian. In the characters' first interaction, for example, John threatens to throw Abigail to the ground. Then, he treats her as a lifeless object, picks her up by the waist, and moves her out of his way. When he places her limp body back down on the ground, he tries to symbolically crush her waistline.[358] Abigail responds to his violence stating "Tu veux m'écraser? Je n'ai pas peur. Chaque fois que tu me touches, tu es paralysé."[359] John seems to be under Abigail's control. Even though John violently objectifies Abigail's body in this scene, he is paralyzed before her. We could even argue that John seems to be under

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[357] Sartre, Les *Sorcières de Salem* 36.

[358] Sartre writes "Proctor rapproche ses mains, les croise, et les serre comme s'il voulait écraser entre elles, la taille d'Abigail." [Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 9.]

[359] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 9.

Abigail's spell. She has some sort of power over him that renders him immobile. In other words, she is witch-like.

Sartre suggests this comparison between Abigail and the witch by allowing John to respond to his lack of control by accusing Abigail of consorting with the Devil. This accusation of witchcraft is significant because it coincides with Abigail, like the traditional witch temptress, trying to entice John with her sexuality. It is also immediately after John treats Abigail as an object that he can maneuver and control. When he realizes that he has lost power over Abigail, however, John resorts to accusing Abigail of evil. Objectification, sexual advances, and witchcraft thus occur simultaneously.

John's accusation is the first mention of witchcraft in the screen play, but it is certainly not the last. And this is not the only scene between the two characters in which John overtly objectifies Abigail's body. If we analyze the scenes where the two characters are alone, we realize that John is violent and aggressive in them all. In the second scene between the two characters, John seizes Abigail by the arm before verbally threatening her. And in their final interaction, John expresses his most violent outburst of emotion when he places both of his hands around Abigail's neck and begins to choke her.

In each of these encounters, Abigail allows John to take control of her body. And she never resists or protests to his ferocious ways. Her body remains limp when he picks her up during their first interaction and even when John chokes her, Sartre's stage directions indicate that "Abigail ne fait pas un movement, elle laisse ses deux bras pendre le long de son corps."[360] Instead of fighting against John's strong hands, Abigail allows him to take complete control of her body. In fact, no matter how violent or dire the situation, Abigail remains docile in John's hands. Since she does not fight back, Abigail agrees with and participates in her own objectification. She even encourages the maltreatment and openly tells John that he can manipulate her body. She states "Je suis docile, vous savez, et je me remets toute entière entre vos mains."[361]

In *L'Etre et le néant*, Sartre offers an explanation for Abigail's actions. He reveals that we often accept objectification because we want to define ourselves according to the Other's perception of us. As Sartre explains, we consent to be an object in the Other's world and hope that the Other, in turn, consents to find his own being and raison d'être in us. Sartre labels this type of person as "the lover" and writes "…l'amant veut être 'tout

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[360] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 125.

[361] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 7.

au monde' pour l'aimé...il veut être l'objet dans lequel l'autre accepte de trouver comme sa facticité seconde, son être."[362] In *Les Sorcières de Salem*, Abigail openly admits that she wants John to define himself according to their relationship. She claims "Pour Dieu tu es une ordure, mais tu te regarderas dans mes yeux et tu verras le fer rouge qui me brûle. Ce fer, c'est toi."[363] Through these words, Abigail reveals that she wants John to find meaning in and through their relationship. She compares her love for him to a burning iron, claims that she wants to be his entire world, and declares that she only exists and burns for him.

According to Sartre, love is an attitude that we adopt because being loved allows us to combat our feelings of being "de trop" in the world. He contends that when we are loved we feel that we have meaning in our lives. Feeling loved, in other words, can justify our existences.[364] Abigail, as a lover, agrees to be an object for John because she wants him to create her identity. She believes that John has opened her eyes to the true reality of life

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[362] Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 408.

[363] Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 128.

[364] Sartre explains "Au lieu que, avant d'être aimé, nous étions inquiets de cette protubérance injustifiée, injustifiable qu'était notre existence; au lieu de sentir "de trop", nous sentons à présent que cette existence est reprise et voulue dans ses moindres détails...C'est là le fond de la joie d'amour, lorsqu'elle existe: nous sentir justifiés d'exister." [Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 411.]

in Salem and is so enthralled with him that she is willing to accuse his wife and others of witchcraft. She kills, she claims, out of love.[365]

Sartre's discussion of the lover in *L'Etre et le néant* leads to another more developed attitude – that of the masochist. Sartre writes that the masochist refuses to be anything more than an object and states that the masochist insists that she wants to be an instrument to be used. When we analyze Abigail's docility in the various scenes with John, we realize that she is acting as a masochist and readily accepting her absolute alienation.[366]

Abigail's masochism is a means for John to affirm his own subjectivity, and Abigail constantly offers up her body as a sacrifice to his quest for self affirmation. Even at the end of the screen play, when John refuses to succumb to accusations of witchcraft, Abigail implores him to confess so that he might live with her and openly offers him free reign over her body, telling him "Si tu vis, tu feras de moi ce que tu voudras."[367] Her body, she claims, is an object that he can use in whatever means he wants.

Sartre writes that the masochist, like the lover, wants to be absorbed by the Other and lose herself in the Other's subjectivity. With John by her

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[365] Abigail admits "J'ai tué pour te garder parce que je t'aime plus que mon salut." [Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 128.]

[366] Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 418.

[367] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 127.

side, Abigail relinquishes the responsibility of defining herself. Instead of taking control of her own identity, Abigail is happy to retreat into the shadows of her lover's identity. She tells John that he forms her entire world and defines her being. In order to continue along this plan of action, Abigail needs to have John's wife killed so that her objectification can become total.

John and Abigail's interactions in *Les Sorcières de Salem* show that we can adopt many different attitudes in our quests to define ourselves. As we have seen, Abigail and John take different approaches to their identity formations. As John's lover and as a masochist, Abigail relishes in and encourages her own objectification. She allows John to determine her identity and encourages his desire to control her body. This objectification, in turn, is a means for John to assert his subjectivity.

Perhaps what is most interesting when we examine the different attitudes and the ways in which Sartre portrays them in *Les Sorcières de Salem* is that they are often used together. Through Abigail and John, Sartre suggests that we may employ several different methods in our attempts to determine our identities. John, like a sadist, uses violence to try and appropriate the Other but also resorts to the caress in order to experience his own subjectivity. Abigail is both a lover and a masochist. What Sartre ultimately suggests through these two characters, therefore, is that we can

combine different attitudes and change our tactics in our struggles to define ourselves depending on how the Other reacts to us.

John and Elisabeth: Witchcraft and Bad Faith

One of the most famous claims in *L'Etre et le néant* is that we are aware to some extent of our freedom and the responsibility that comes with it, but we try to hide from ourselves. We are cognizant, claims Sartre, that the pressures and demands that the world presents to us are the result of the ways in which we see and engage with things, and that this in turn is the result of our changeable identities rather than any fixed natures. But explicitly thinking about this induces in us a feeling of anguish. In order to

avoid this, we try to deny this responsibility for the way we are and the ways in which we behave. This is what Sartre calls bad faith.

As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, Sartre contends that the Other's gaze is a crucial component of our identity formation because without the Other, we cannot fully grasp our identities. When we encounter the Other's look, we experience ourselves through a new lens. Through the Other, we see *ourselves* because the Other sees *us*. This new gaze allows us to see a version of ourselves that we could not conceive of or appropriate alone.

Because other individuals have the power to influence our identities, Sartre suggests that they disturb our individual field of meanings and challenge the world, and the identity that we have made. In this way, others are fundamentally negative: they take our identity away from us; they upset our field of constructed meaning; they project a different set of values upon us.

When we see ourselves through the Other's eyes, it can be a troubling experience. In particular, they may send us an image of ourselves that we deny or that we prefer to ignore. We may be ashamed of the way that we act and of the way that the Other perceives us. When we are aware of being

seen, it changes the way that we interact with the world and, consequently, the nature of our existences.

As we will see, the gaze plays an important role in *Les Sorcières de Salem* because it reveals John's bad faith. Rather than accept responsibility for his identity formation, John tries to create an identity through the lens of Elisabeth's perspective. In other words, John wants to define himself according to how Elisabeth sees him.[368] For the majority of the scenario, John is thus a prime example of self-deception. He attempts to create an identity that he cannot maintain. Since he knows the truth but avoids it, John creates a false sense of self that troubles him and experiences the anguish associated with avoiding his freedom and the truth of his identity.

In *Les Sorcières de Salem*, Sartre demonstrates the shame that John Proctor experiences when he is seen by Elisabeth. When Elisabeth discovers that John is having an affair with Abigail, John tells her

> Je ne pouvais plus mentir. J'attendais ce moment. Je suis soulagé. Comme je serai le jour du jugement quand je le regard de Dieu traversera mon âme. Vous me voyez dans ma vérité,

[368] When John is in the Salem prison, he still shows concern for Elisabeth's judgment of him. He laments "Elisabeth me verra, du haut de son ciel. Elle me verra sauter dans le feu comme une grenouille. Et elle dira : 'C'est juste', de sa belle voix froide. A chaque seconde et pendant l'éternité." [Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 119.]

> Elisabeth. Vous me connaissez aussi bien que Dieu me connait lui-même.[369]

This interaction between John and Elisabeth is important on many different levels. John tells Elisabeth that she *sees* his true character and compares Elisabeth to God, asking that she confer an identity on him. He wants to absorb her view of himself and thereby divest himself of all responsibility for his own identity.

Elisabeth's discovery forces John to confront what he would prefer to ignore. Before he encounters Elisabeth's gaze, John creates an identity that is paradoxical, for he both knows the truth of his actions and denies them. In other words, John is an example of bad faith. Elisabeth's gaze and John's reaction to her are important because they allow us to witness John's self-deception. Because John wants and needs to define himself according to Elisabeth's perception of him, he constantly references her ability to *see* him. In fact, his need is so strong that her presence even haunts him while he is in the Salem jail. He states that "Elisabeth me verra, du haut de son ciel. Elle me verra sauter dans le feu comme une grenouille."[370] Elisabeth will see him, he claims, and judge him while she delights in the splendors of

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[369] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 37.

[370] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 119.

heaven. What bothers John more than his own damnation is the thought of Elisabeth looking down upon him and judging him.

As long as John defines himself according to Elisabeth's perception of him, he flees the responsibility associated with defining his own identity and remains in bad faith. Sartre contends that we are all responsible for defining ourselves and are all free to determine what we want to be. This realization of our ultimate freedom, however, can be a terrifying experience. It means that we can no longer rely on exterior sources, blame others, or subscribe to absolutes in our quest for self identity. Instead, we choose what we are by our actions and are responsible for becoming what we want to be.

Sartre shows John struggling with this unavoidable freedom throughout the scenario. In addition to defining himself through Elisabeth's eyes, Sartre highlights three other ways that John shirks responsibility for his identity. First, John blames Abigail and Elisabeth for his actions. He claims that Elisabeth prompted his adulterous relationship with Abigail because she did not sexually satisfy him for seven months. He tells Elisabeth "Vous êtes mon associée, ma sœur (riant sans gaité) quelque fois ma mère. Mais depuis sept mois vous n'êtes plus ma femme."[371] Part of Elisabeth's duty as wife, John claims, is to fulfill her husband. When she

[371] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 32.

does not sleep with him, he decides to find sexual gratification outside of the marriage bed. He thus blames her for his sexual transgression.[372]

John also tries to avoid taking responsibility for his adulterous relationship with Abigail by arguing that Abigail tempts him with her sexual advances. In one encounter, he lambasts Abigail stating "C'est toi qui viens la nuit. C'est toi qui m'a tenté."[373] Instead of realizing that he chose to engage in sexual relations with Abigail, John blames Abigail and his body for not resisting to her temptations.[374]

John also tries to flee his freedom by refusing to admit the reality of his situation. He states "...j'en ai tellement honte que j'essaye parfois de me le cacher à moi-même."[375] John's revelation of his feelings here is important because he refers to the *shame* that he experiences when he lies to himself. In *L'Etre et le néant*, Sartre comments extensively on the role that shame

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[372] John also claims that Elisabeth is so virtuous that it pushes him to sin. He states "Il y a beaucoup de manières, pour une femme, d'expédier un homme en enfer. Elle peut le damner en lui donnant le goût du vice. Mais elle le damne aussi quelquefois, parce qu'elle aime trop la vertu." [Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 33.] Through this interaction, Sartre makes it clear that John holds Elisabeth responsible for his actions.

[373] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 8.

[374] He tells Abigail that he desires her "Parce que le corps est une chiennerie. Mais je ne céderai jamais plus." [Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 44.]

[375] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 90z.

plays in our identity formation and contends that shame is the recognition that we are objects which the Other is looking at and judging.[376]

When John hides from himself and hides his adulterous relationship with Abigail, he avoids taking responsibility for his actions. When Elisabeth sees John, however, he must confront his self-deception head on. If Elisabeth had not seen John, he would have remained trapped within the confines of his own subjective perspective and likely would have continued his affair with Abigail. Being seen thus changes the way that John views himself as well as the way that he acts.

Being authentic for John would require that he admit that he is responsible for what he has done and recognize that it is self-deceptive to blame others, to hide from himself, or to withhold the truth of his relationship with Abigail in an effort to relieve himself of his responsibility. Instead of confronting his actions and accepting the identity that he has created for himself, John wants to hide from Salem society by running away with Abigail. In *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, Sartre writes that people who want to flee their own actions like John are cowards. He explains that cowardice is "l'acte de renoncer ou de céder…le lâche est défini à partir de l'acte qu'il a fait…le lâche se fait lâche…il y a toujours une

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[376]Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant* 300.

possibilité pour le lâche de ne plus être lâche."[377] In a conversation with Abigail, John employs this existentialist classification to describe himself. When John states "Je suis un lâche"[378] Sartre confirms that John is refusing to take responsibility for his actions.

Even at the end of the film, John tries to avoid taking responsibility for his identity by asking Elisabeth to define him. He states "Pour la dernière fois en cette vie, soyez mon juge. J'ai raison, n'est-ce pas?"[379] Sartre's stage directions reveal John's hesitation at accepting responsibility for his actions. He writes "Il veut seulement l'engager à répondre pour qu'elle assume avec lui, la responsabilité de sa mort."[380] When she refuses, Elisabeth helps to force John to take charge of his identity.

As John accepts this task, he realizes that he is a product of his decisions. He no longer doubts what he must do, constructs a solid identity, and proclaims "Laissez-moi relever la tête: il y a si longtemps que je la tiens courbée."[381] Sartre's description of John's sudden and intuitive leap of

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[377] Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1996) 55-6.

[378] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 129.

[379] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 137.

[380] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 136.

[381] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 136.

understanding distinguishes his scenario from Marcel Aymé's.[382] In an interview entitled "Jean-Paul Sartre Nous Parle de Théâtre," Sartre admitted to changing the ending of Marcel Aymé's play because he claimed that "ce qui me gêne, c'est l'ambiguité de sa conclusion... [qui] ne signifie plus rien."[383] In Aymé's version, John continues to define himself according to the image that he projects. He does not want to confess to witchcraft in front of others and does not want to have his name sullied by the posting of his signed confession in Salem's church. In Aymé's screenplay, John states

> Dieu n'a pas besoin de voir mon nom affiché dans l'église.
>
> Dieu le voit, ce nom. Il sait combien mes péchés sont noirs. ...
>
> Ce que disent les autres et ce que je signe, ça fait deux.[384]

Aymé develops John's character to demonstrate that the witch protagonist is obsessed with what the other inhabitants of Salem think of him. Aymé's John defines his own self-worth according their judgments.

Aymé also suggests that John continues to model his own value system according to the severe Protestant laws of Salem's society. By

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[382] As stated in the introduction, Aymé was the first to attempt an adaptation of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. His version hit the stage for the first time at Le Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt in 1954. The play starred Simone Signoret, Yves Montand, Nicole Courcel, and Roger Mondy.

[383] Sartre, "Jean-Paul Sartre nous parle de théâtre," *Théâtre Populaire*. 15 (1955): 9.

[384] Marcel Aymé, *Les Sorcières de Salem* (Paris: Grasset, 1955) 247.

pretending that his values are imposed and not chosen, Aymé's John continues to exist in bad faith. At the end of Sartre's version, by contrast, John admits to his own tendency to flee responsibility, denies the religious ethic established by the Salem society, and assumes responsibility for his actions. John realizes that he cannot rely on religion or on anyone to create his personal value system. Whereas Aymé's character holds true to the Protestant ethic, Sartre's witch declares "Je dis que Dieu est mort."[385] In *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, Sartre reveals the extreme import of John's statement. He writes that when we deny the existence of God

> ...avec lui disparait toute possibilité de trouver des valeurs dans un ciel intelligible; il ne peut plus y avoir de bien *a priori*, puisqu'il n'y a pas de conscience infinie et parfaite pour le penser...nous n'avons ni derrière nous, ni devant nous...des valeurs, des justifications ou des excuses. Nous sommes seules, sans excuses.[386]

When John says "God is dead," he stresses that no God or heaven could give meaning to his life. Rather than utilize religion as a dodge for facing the hard truths of his life, Sartre's John accepts responsibility for his actions.

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[385] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 90ab.

[386] Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* 38-9.

Sartre highlights John's sudden realization and newfound confidence through stage directions. He writes "A partir de cet instant, c'est lui qui mène toute la scène."[387]

Sartre thus transforms the scenario's ending so that John Proctor's death becomes more apparent as "un acte libre qu'il fait pour déchaîner le scandale."[388] According to Sartre, the new ending of the play is an act of revolt based in social conflict and John's death is a suicide for social change. In the potent final scene between John and the religious authorities, the witch protagonist reveals the profound meaning of his death. He states

> Direz-vous encore que ma mort est inutile? Si j'acceptais de mentir, ils s'en iraient tête basse en pensant que vous aviez raison. Mais quand on aurait mit la corde au cou, leur colère soufflera sur Salem et vous balaiera comme des feuilles mortes.[389]

Sartre reveals that John chooses to die as a martyr for freedom. Instead of accepting an imposed and false identity, John takes charge of his own fate. He denies any links to witchcraft, rejects all identities that are forced upon him, and realizes that he alone is responsible for defining his identity.

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[387] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 138.

[388] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 9.

[389] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 138.

What Sartre demonstrates through Elisabeth and John is that even if the Other sees us and confers an identity upon us, it is still our responsibility to work to form our own identity. He demonstrates that John must control and form his identity in spite of the Salem society's view of him and in spite of the rigid Puritan ethic. Sartre shows that John is responsible for making the choices that determine his identity because he is, to use Sartre's words, condemned to be free. Part of the exercise of his freedom, however, requires that John experience the unending task of having to choose and of having to accept responsibility for his choices. Unfortunately, John only seems to learn this lesson at the very end of the scenario.

Conclusion
The Twentieth-Century Witch

What She Can Teach Us

Reading about witches allows us to reconsider the dominant myths that surround this fascinating creature. Because the witch is a being who is in transition, who questions and contests the models that try to contain her, and who continues to evolve, she can perfectly elucidate many different theories. Occasionally the witch causes states of fascination that rival the best bewitchment, or unleashes terrors in us not to be outdone by any manifestation of the Devil. She is a mischievous being who crosses our path in numerous transformations and disguises, playing all kinds of tricks on us. The witch is also a victim, a figure to be pitied. She is a kind and caring healer who wants to help unlucky lovers find true peace. These variegated definitions haunt and confuse us. They set hurdles that we must jump in our attempt to uncover the true identity and purpose of the witch.

The witch's literary manifestations are proof of her murkiness but also reveal the extent of her evolution. In my first chapter, I suggested that Sprenger and Kramer redefined the witch, describing her as a sexually charged temptress who provoked men to sin. In literary texts, the witch became a force that sought to control man and to corrupt him, yet she

confused him precisely because she was not easy to grasp. Her duality was embodied in the witch's fantastic nature, on the one hand superior to man because of her superhuman qualities, and, on the other hand inferior to him because of her sex. Sprenger and Kramer argued that the female body prevented women from reasoning like they should and blamed their structure for their deceitfulness.[390] They suggested that women were "more carnal than a man," "quicker to waver in faith," "feebler in mind and body," "more impressionable," and tormented by "inordinate affections and passions."[391]

As I demonstrated in chapter two, prior to the *Malleus* authors portrayed the witch as a benevolent healer. She was a compassionate and caring individual who possessed secret powers that she used for good. Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes, and the anonymous author of *Amadas et Ydoine* created witches who prepared potions using diverse plants and were esteemed for their services. But after the *Malleus* any healing performed by any woman was the work of the Devil and any woman who attempted to heal was immediately labeled a witch.

Despite the witch's new definition, she remains an unstable force to be reckoned with. She is a malevolent figure associated with sex, but the

[390] They argued that "...there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives." [Sprenger and Kramer, 44.]

[391] Sprenger and Kramer, 44-5.

witch is also constantly figured and refigured. The witch's multivalence is exemplified in the literary texts that followed the publication of the *Malleus*. Ronsard, Rabelais, and Corneille create immodest, evil witches; Du Bellay openly acknowledges the link between witches and sex; and Montaigne believes the witches' supernatural powers are simply the result of overactive imaginations.

In the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, as the belief in witchcraft diminished among the educated elite, the witch disappeared from most literary texts. Voltaire and the Encyclopédistes argued that the witch was not a mysterious being, but was completely comprehensible in the authoritative discourses of science and medicine. Witches, for these men, were figures that represented ignorance, groundless suspicion and credulity, the opposites of learning, rationality, and civility. They argued that witches were a spectacle of popular culture that enlightened individuals had outgrown and used them as an example of beliefs that should be looked down upon, beliefs that were no longer current.

By the twentieth century, however, writers like Anne Hébert, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maryse Condé, and Sebastiano Vassalli re(dis)covered the witch and concentrated on retelling her story. While they continued to rely on the definition proposed by the two Dominicans, these authors also both

recovered and discovered what they believed to be the truth behind the witchcraft phenomenon.

First, these authors demonstrated that the witch is the victim of imposed identity labels. Using their novels and their fictional witch characters as examples, Hébert, Sartre, Condé, and Vassalli revealed how much our identity can be influenced by the perceptions of other people. In chapter three, I argued that the witch is an unfortunate scapegoat who reveals the extent to which our identities are influenced by the nature of our relations to others. I suggested that each author created a witch protagonist whose identity was determined and defined by interactions with her family members and with other individuals in her community. I suggested that the witch was a marginalized being and that others sought to define themselves against her, to fashion their own identities by opposition.

In chapter five I argued that while Sartre suggested that witches were women who entered into conflict with the other individuals in their respective societies, he also suggested that the fear of the witch was primarily the fear of losing the self to the malign and unseen power of another. By objectifying the Other and declaring her a witch, the characters were able to create identities that refused the identities of the Other. His

witches reveal the power of objectification as well as the dangers of bad faith.

The witches in twentieth-century literature are labile, sliding across a number of different and competing discourses. While the witches exhibit some similarities (they are all marginalized and assigned unjust identities, for example), we cannot bring them into relationship with one another without blurring their differences. A close analysis of each work reveals that the twentieth-century authors have differing theories about what they believe to be the most significant factors that influence identity formation. In their respective texts, the authors elucidate their own theories as they demonstrate the differing role that memories, the unconscious, and family relationships play in the development of each witch character.

Hébert's novel is a potent reminder that we are the composite of all previous identities. As I demonstrated in chapter four, Hébert utilizes some of the principles of Freudian theory. Through *soeur* Julie, Hébert proposes that individuals are the sum of unconscious identities that make them who they are even though those identities may remain alien to them. *Soeur* Julie has a witch history, and it affects her present identity. Lest we jump to conclusions, however, the ambiguity of Hébert's novel reminds us that her protagonist's actions in the convent do not imply that she is *solely* a witch.

While her past has the ability to affect her present, *soeur* Julie is neither witch nor hysteric.

What Hébert ultimately suggests through her novel is that individuals can occupy two different identities at the same time. Rather than label her witch-like character as a witch or as a hysteric, I argued that Hébert constructs *soeur* Julie's identity like a pendulum that is constantly swinging between the two poles. I also suggested that *soeur* Julie, depending on the chapter, seems to be a saint, a hysteric, a victim of her situation in the convent, a victim of paternal rape, the target of child abuse, a seductress, a witch, and a murderer. By allowing *soeur* Julie to alternate between several conflicting identities, Hébert suggests the need to move beyond stagnant and absolute identity labels.

In chapter five I suggested that Sarte's witches demonstrate how all individuals must fight to define themselves. I argued that his witches elucidate the philosopher's existential theories and prove that witches were often the unlucky losers in the battle against the Other. In *Les Sorcières de Salem*, Sartre demonstrates that individuals are composed of multiple individualities but does not allow any of these seemingly alter identities to have dominion over his witches. During a scene with Abigail, for example, John references an inner beast, an alter ego that affects his actions. While

this beast makes us think of the unconscious portion of John's identity, Sartre classifies this beast as something that his witch protagonist can control. In a conversation with Abigail, John reveals the disjunction in his own identity. He states "Ce n'est pas moi qui te désirais, c'est ma bête. Je la crèverai, la bête, je l'assommerai de travail. Je redeviendrai pur."[392] John's "beast" is not an alien piece of the witch's consciousness. It cannot control his actions and is not a buried unconscious identity. By constructing John's consciousness in this way, Sartre demonstrates his belief that that consciousness is always self-aware. And because consciousness is self-aware, Satre rejects Freud's idea of the unconscious.[393]

Sartre also rejects Freud's idea of the unconscious by creating John's identity to demonstrate that he is a thinking subject grounded upon a more fundamental acting subject. As Sartre explains in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* "l'homme n'est rien d'autre que ce qu'il se fait."[394] Because John has the ability to act and control his own behavior, Sartre suggests that his witch has nothing within him to determine or restrict him. Unlike *soeur*

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[392] Sartre, *Les Sorcières de Salem* 10.

[393] In *L'Etre et le néant*, Sartre contends that in order for repression and resistance to be possible, the subject must be conscious of the impulses that it wants to repress.

[394] Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* 30.

Julie who often felt that she was being "capturée par des forces obscures,"[395] John and all of Sartre's witches can control their own actions. They are not under the influence of unconscious identities. Instead, they are free acting subjects who have the ability to create their own identities. Through John, Sartre suggests that individuals can choose to dominate their inner beasts. For Sartre, identity formation involves recognizing that what happened in the past need not have happened, that present dispositions are not determined, and that the future is wide open to changes.

In *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* and in *La Chimera*, Condé and Vassalli suggest that the major factor that affected Tituba and Antonia were the rumors that circulated through their societies. As I demonstrated in chapter three, the witches in these novels are tainted by their pasts and struggle to determine their own identities. But Tituba and Antonia differ from *soeur* Julie because they do not suffer from internal, personal, and repressed facets of their own memories. Instead, Tituba and Antonia must endure the effects of their familial relationships and of the external, societal memories that circulate through legends and rumors. Because their societies establish identities for them, Antonia and Tituba are victims of imposed identities that affect their entire existences. Vassalli explains that these

[395]Hébert, *Les Enfants du sabbat* 17.

rumors created Antonia's witch identity, an identity that he puts in parentheses. And by constantly referring to her as the "strega di Zardino," Vassalli highlights the constructed nature of her identity.

In *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem*, even though Tituba is not at the mercy of unconscious, repressed memories, Condé makes it clear that her witch protagonist is not entirely free. Tituba must submit to a predetermined series of events that affect her identity. Condé demonstrates this idea throughout the novel, but one of the best examples is perhaps when Tituba reveals her desire to utilize black magic to kill Susanna Endicott. Tituba wants to employ her powers to murder her enslaver and ensure her personal gain. But Abena warns her that such harmful actions will not alter her life's path. She states

> Même si elle meurt, ton destin s'accomplira. Et tu auras vicié ton cœur. Tu seras devenue pareille à eux, qui ne savent que tuer, détruire. Frappe-la seulement d'une maladie incommode, humiliante![396]

Abena reveals that Tituba has a personal decision to make that will affect her identity. She can become the wicked witch who murders or she can inflict

[396] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 53.

Susanna Endicott with a humiliating condition. Her destiny, Abena claims, will be fulfilled no matter how hard Tituba tries to resist its pull.

Through Tituba, Condé develops an optimistic theory of identity formation that is psychologically valuable in its suggestion that we can significantly modify our identities if we choose to react differently. Tituba cannot affect the circumstances of her life, but she does have control over her response to the difficult times. Condé suggests that we, like Tituba, can transform ourselves by making choices about how we want to react to the situational conflicts in our lives.

Condé constructs her witch character's identity and traces Tituba's identity formation in a way that makes her witch appear more human. Like a normal human being, Tituba must suffer from what other people think of her and she must embark on an ambiguous path that includes times of uncertainty and unpredictability. Even though she is a witch with powers that exceed those of mere mortals, Tituba must choose what she wants to become. At one point in the novel, Tituba explains and bemoans the limits of her powers

> Si je pouvais communiquer avec les forces de l'invisible, et, avec leur appui, infléchir le présent, je ne savais pas déchiffrer les signes de l'avenir. … Je le sentais, de terribles dangers me

> menaçaient, mais j'étais incapable de les nommer, et je le savais, ni Abena ma mère ni Man Yaya ne pourraient intervenir pour m'éclairer.[397]

Tituba reveals that she can soften any present tribulations but has no power over the future. Like an ordinary human being, she admits that she would like to be able to decipher and circumvent the ambiguities and dangers that threaten her life. By allowing Tituba to suffer from the same trials and tribulations that afflict all human beings, Condé creates a sympathetic witch character that is easy to relate to. Through Tituba, she suggests that times of insecurities, ambiguities, and difficulties are part of the human condition.

While the texts are diverse, another commonality that emerges is that witchcraft has a lot to do with control and fear. Control over one's own identity and control over the identity of the Other. Fear that the Other will have the power to control us. Fear that they will assign us with an identity that we cannot combat. Control over how we choose to react to the circumstances of our lives. Fear that we cannot understand or predict what circumstances we will have to encounter. Fear that those circumstances will define us. While we want to simplify witchcraft so that it is a story with clear oppositions and want to be able to tell who is good and who is bad,

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[397] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 59.

who is oppressed and who the oppressor is, these authors teach us that we also have to contend with the external factors and with the role that fear and control played in each case. For while it would be much simpler to define the witch as evil source of pollution who lived to reap havoc, these stories teach us that the witch is an unstable term and represents numerous sites of conflict and contestation.

To say that the twentieth-century authors construct witch characters that are complicated would be an oversimplification of the issues at hand. The witches are not simply evil but they are also not inherently good. The witches offer opportunities for both identification and elaborate fantasy. They live real lives in real societies and participate in the mundane circumstances of everyday life. By focusing on the societal and intrapersonal factors that influence the witches rather than creating witches that live in a fantasy-realm, the twentieth-century authors avoid the mistakes of those who want to emphasize and situate witches in a pure and matriarchal golden age. The witch protagonists that we find in Sartre, Hébert, Vassalli, and Condé are far from these "modern witches."[398]

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[398] When I use the term "modern witches" here I am referring to those individuals who actively practice witchcraft today and believe themselves witches. While there are various sects of modern witches, they tend to all believe in a Mother Goddess and her male consort (polytheism), see the natural world as invested with spiritual significance (pantheism), and adopt an ancient calendar that marks their feasts and rituals. They believe in an originary matriarchy located in the prehistorical ancient world and celebrate a religion that they believe offers a corrective to patriarchal religious practices by promoting female creativity and imagination. Recent novels like Paulo Coelho's *The Witch of Portobello* (2007) explore the

When I began my research, I asked myself many questions. What is the purpose of the witch in twentieth-century literature? Why turn to a figure from the past and how relevant is she for our understanding of the present? What do we mean today when we utilize the term "witch"?

What I've learned is that the "witch" is not single and fixed, but highly unstable, a site of conflict and contestation. The "witch" has been tugged in new directions throughout the centuries by authors and by our own demands and desires. Like her magic, she is formless, able to associate with whatever we desire. Consequently, she offers opportunities for both identification and imagination. Because the twentieth-century witch is so malleable, Hébert, Vassalli, Sartre, and Condé can utilize her to accomplish and elucidate varied theories. The diversity of these theories and of the witches in twentieth-century literature is a strong testimony to the impossibility of defining the witch, of getting to the bottom of her. And as long as she continues to elude us, we will continue to be seduced by her very unavailability.

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goddess religion and focus on the return of the witch to this matriarchy. But by attempting to situate witches in a past golden age, modern witches and the authors who write about them relegate these women and their power in politics and religion to a past that is lost. They associate women with the absence of civilization, technology, and modernity. And they ignore the role that all of this has played in female lives. The real-world settings of Sartre, Hébert, Condé, and Vassalli's novels avoid these errors.

The twentieth-century witches are not without import; they ultimately participate in an important reconstruction of the witch character. The witches tell stories that remind us of things and times that we might otherwise forget. They force us to ask questions that historians cannot answer, they demand that we rethink the relations between body and identity, and they offer a new way for us to see History. For despite being literary inventions, these protagonists ultimately enter into the ongoing historical debate that seeks to determine the function of the witch in History.

With their stories of witchcraft, the twentieth-century authors attack History and the historical definition of the witch. Unlike most History which recounts the story of the dominant power groups, these authors focus on the histories of women who existed on the periphery. They offer an account of History from below; Hébert, Vassalli, Condé, and Sartre create narratives that provide reports of History from the point of view of the loser. Thanks to these authors, the victims (the witches) are given a voice and are allowed to remember History differently.

While the desire to rehabilitate the witch by focusing on History's biased treatment of her is evident in all of the twentieth-century narratives of witchcraft, it is especially obvious in Vassalli and Condé's novels. Their narratives, more than those of Sartre and Hébert, demonstrate their desire to

challenge and deconstruct the witch while providing a modern critique of witchcraft accusations that calls attention to the fact that the witch is a victim of History.

Vassalli and Condé begin their critique of History by suggesting that the witch is the victim of History's forgetfulness. Vassalli believes that the tendency to forget is a defining characteristic of Italian society. In an interview with Meriel Tulante he states that

> Uno del fili conduttori del mio lavoro è quello del carattere nazionale. ... L'Italia è un paese molto ricco di storia, e forse l'elemento principale del carattere nazionale italiano è la capacità di dimenticare. Credo sia una cosa unica al mondo, e qui da noi sembra normale.[399]

Through these words, Vassalli acknowledges Italy's tendency to overlook and forget certain aspects of History, a fault that he openly characterizes as a national problem. As an author, however, Vassalli believes that he can help to remedy this problem. In the prologue of *La Chimera*, Vassalli explains that he wrote Antonia's story to highlight a defining period of the seventeenth century and to combat Italy's tendency to overlook the importance of individuals like her. He explains

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[399] Sebastiano Vassalli, "Conversations with Sebastiano Vassalli," *Italianist*. (Reading: University of Reading, 2007) 337.

> ...ho cercato di descrivere e che oggi – come spesso capita – è nebbioso, c'è sepolta una storia: una grande storia, d'una ragazza che visse tra il 1590 e il 1610 e che si chiamò Antonia, e delle persone che furono vive insieme a lei, negli anni stessi in cui lei fu viva, e che lei conobbe; di quell'epoca e di questi luoghi. Già da tempo mi proponevo di riportare quella storia alla luce..."[400]

Here, Vassalli acknowledges his desire to bring Antonia's story "into the light" so that she is not forgotten.

Many scholars have commented on the significance of Vassalli's historical objective. Charles Klopp notes that "*La Chimera* brings to life characters otherwise forgotten by history during a moment in time when implacable powers did not hesitate to roll over weak individuals – women in particular – who happened to be in their way."[401] Meriel Tulante suggests that Vassalli is drawn to stories like Antonia's because he wants to investigate those events that have been overlooked or deliberately hidden. She contends that such questioning of the uses of history has informed

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[400] Vassalli, *La Chimera* 9.

[401] Charles Klopp, "Fiction in Italy Since the Years of Lead: A Quarter Century of Top Novels," *World Literature Today* 79.3 (2005)37.

Vassalli's writing since the mid 1980s.[402] In *Sebastiano Vassalli: Literary Lives*, Zygmunt Baranski also suggests that Vassalli chose to pen Antonia's story to show the "feebleness of community memory" and chastise those "historians who have allowed such a 'clamorous event' to be forgotten."[403] And Ruth Glynn writes that Vassalli seeks to redress the "imbalances" of history "...and to present a colourful tableau of people, places, and practices which have not 'fatto la storia', yet which should not be lost to the fog of time."[404] She argues that Vassalli wants to present an alternative to the official culture enshrined in historical documents and an "antidote" to the darkness and loss of the past.[405] For Vassalli, writing about Antonia is important because it forces us to reconsider and contest the dominant accounts and myths that surround the witch.

Like Vassalli, Condé makes it quite clear that she wanted to document Tituba's story and call attention to an unfortunate story of witchcraft so that it is not forgotten. In an interview with Vèvè Clark, Condé reveals that she

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[402] Meriel Tulante, "Conversations with Sebastiano Vassalli," *Italianist* (Reading: University of Reading, 2007) 346.

[403] Zygmunt G. Baranksi, "Sebastiano Vassalli: Literary Lives," *The New Italian Novel*, eds. Zygmunt G. Baranski and Lino Pertile. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) 240.

[404] Glynn 87.

[405] Glynn 87.

decided to write about Tituba after learning about the witch during her Fulbright year at Occidental College in 1985. She explains

> Une fois que j'eus entendu parler de Tituba, j'ai voulu savoir qui elle était exactement. Richard m'a dit que c'était un personnage fictif. Je n'étais pas d'accord parce qu'elle avait été peinte par deux auteurs, Arthur Miller et Anne Petry et j'ai pensé qu'elle pouvait bien avoir été quelqu'un dans la réalité. Quand j'ai commencé à en apprendre plus sur son histoire, je n'ai pas pu la lâcher.[406]

Condé explains that she was fascinated and captivated by Tituba but could find little written about her. After researching the Salem archives, Condé concluded that historians had overlooked the witch.

Condé links Western civilization's treatment of witches to its history of racist oppression. In the *Note historique* at the end of the novel, she blames racism for Tituba's non-inclusion in the Salem archives stating that "...le racisme, conscient ou inconscient, des historiens est tel qu'aucun n'en soucie."[407] This, along with Tituba's own statements in the novel, reveal Condé's lack of confidence in history's accurate portrayal of her witch

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[406] Maryse Condé, "I Have Made Peace With My Island," interview with Vèvè Clark, *Callaloo* (38): 1989 128.

[407] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 278.

character.[408] Elisabeth Mudimbé-Boyi writes "In letting Tituba speak and tell her story in her own words, Condé gives her a voice, restores her history and her identity, and allows her to acquire language and thus to participate in society."[409] She argues that Condé completely disappears from the novel and that Tituba takes over as both the narrator and the narrated. Marie Denise Shelton writes that giving Tituba voice is what allows Condé to uncover the interplay between subjectivity and history.[410] And Mara Dukats explains that Condé's novel is about writing a historically effaced woman into History. Rather than accept History's interpretation of her, Dukats argues that Condé writes Tituba a life and a subjectivity.[411] In an interview with Françoise Pfaff, Condé affirms that she wanted to create a story for Tituba because historians had failed to do so. She explains

> Mais ce qui m'avait surtout interpellée, c'était le racisme à l'égard de cette femme noire qu'on avait complètement oubliée.

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[408] At one point in the novel, Tituba explains that she has been forgotten. "Je cherche mon histoire dans celle des Sorcières de Salem et ne la trouve pas. ... De moi, on parle pas. 'Tituba une esclave originaire de la Barbade et pratiquant vraisemblablement le hodoo.'" [Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière noire de Salem* 230.]

[409] Elisabeth Mudimbé-Boyi, "Giving a Voice to Tituba: The Death of the Author?" *World Literature Today* 67.4 (1993): 751.

[410] Shelton 752.

[411] Mara Dukats, "A Narrative of Violated Maternity: Moi, Tituba sorcière Noire de Salem..." *World Literature Today* 67.4 (1993): 745-50.

> Rayée de l'histoire. Tituba n'avait pas été réhabilitée alors que toutes les autres femmes l'avaient été.[412]

Because she was frustrated with historians' omission of her story, Condé took it upon herself to recount Tituba's involvement in the Salem witch trials. Condé's witch figure functions not only to elucidate the contradictions in the Salem society and in official historical documents, but also to point out the racism that afflicts Western ideologies. By telling Tituba's story and focusing on the racist interactions of her witch protagonist, Condé hopes to point out the gaps in history, open historical accounts up to criticism, and call attention to the constructed and biased nature of the entire enterprise. Tituba's story, like Antonia's, is about existence, identity, and presence.

Witches, for Vassalli, Hébert, Sartre and Condé, are figures who are valid historical subjects with stories to recount that criticize their own societies as well as larger historical and cultural traditions. With their narratives, the twentieth-century authors suggest that novelists can cast light on areas that traditional historians fail to take into account. Novelists can provide a greater understanding of History by reappropriating historical characters and reanalyzing their stories. Baranski writes that Vassalli has a

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[412]Maryse Condé, *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé*, by Françoise Pfaff (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1993): 91.

"deadly serious view of writing" and claims that he is irritated with the frivolities and self-centeredness of other artists. He writes that Vassalli is "a deeply moral writer, resolutely preoccupied with the mess which humanity has made of History."[413]

But witch characters are not only figures from the past; the witches in the twentieth-century texts can also teach us a lot about the present. Condé tells Tituba's story and highlights the role that race played in her accusation because she believes that the sort of racial discrimination experienced by her witch character still plagues modern society. As she explains

> L'histoire des puritains ne m'intéressait pas en tant que telle. Je voulais monter que les intolérances, les préjugés et le racisme dont Tituba est victime existent encore... *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière Noire de Salem* est un roman d'aujourd'hui, ce n'est pas du tout un roman historique.[414]

Condé suggests that her novel can provide a better understanding of current realities. Returning to the seventeenth century is a means for her to trace the maliciousness of racism in the Salem society, but she contends that the novel teaches lessons that are applicable to contemporary society as well.

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[413]Baranksi 246-7.

[414] Condé, *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé* 96.

Vassalli also suggests that the past can teach us a lot about the present. In the prelude to his novel, Vassalli comments explicitly, in the first person, on the nature of the past and on the role of writing in the construction of our understanding of the present. Vassalli writes

> Per cercare le chiavi del presente, e per capirlo, bisogna uscire dal rumore: andare in fono alla note, o in fondo al nulla; magari laggiù, un po' a sinistra e un po'oltre il secondo cavalcavia, sotto il "macigno bianco" che oggi non si vede. Nel villaggio fantasma di Zardino, nella storia di Antonia. E così ho fatto.[415]

Vassalli's novel, like Condé's, aims at understanding the present through an exploration of the past. He believes that his return to the past is a means to search for a more complete understanding and explanation of his current reality. Even if the events and experiences of the past cannot be recaptured, Vassalli believes that telling past stories like Antonia's can prove to be helpful in reaching a more complete understanding of the present.[416] As Baranksi points out "*La Chimera* is not simply a book about a moment long-lost in time, it is also a statement about the similarities between the past and

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[415] Vassalli, *La Chimera* 10-11.

[416] Vassalli also explains in the prelude that he returned to the past because he believes that it is impossible to accurately represent the present. In an interview with Tulante, Vassalli explained "Durante la scrittura della *Chimera* c'è stato un momento in cui mi ero persuaso che non valesse la pena di raccontare il presente. ... E allora ho pensato che per capire il presente fosse meglio fare un passo indietro e quindi cercare nelle origini" (338).

the present, about the unchangeable face of humanity, and about the origins of contemporary Italy."[417] By returning to the past and tracing clear parallels with the present, the twentieth-century authors can educate their readers about the mistakes of the past so that they might not be repeated in the present and in the future.

Writing about the past is also important because it is only in the past that an alternative to the modern world can be imagined. By connecting with a lost past, the twentieth-century authors can recover the values lost to modern society. Through the witch, the twentieth-century authors can enter into a new world. They can challenge readers to reexamine what should be considered normal and can stimulate them to open their minds and consider what modern beliefs really imply. The stories of witchcraft help us to look to the past to find our current selves. As we scan the past in search of confirmation of who were are, of who we have become, we can find both what we should aim for and what we should aim against. So even though the term "witch" is not single and fixed, we can use her to learn a lot about ourselves, a lot about our past, and a lot about how we interact with others.

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[417] Baranski 254.

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